

Diaries  
of the Jesuit Missionaries

at Bulawayo 1879 - 1881

Publication No. 4

of

The Rhodesiana Society

1959



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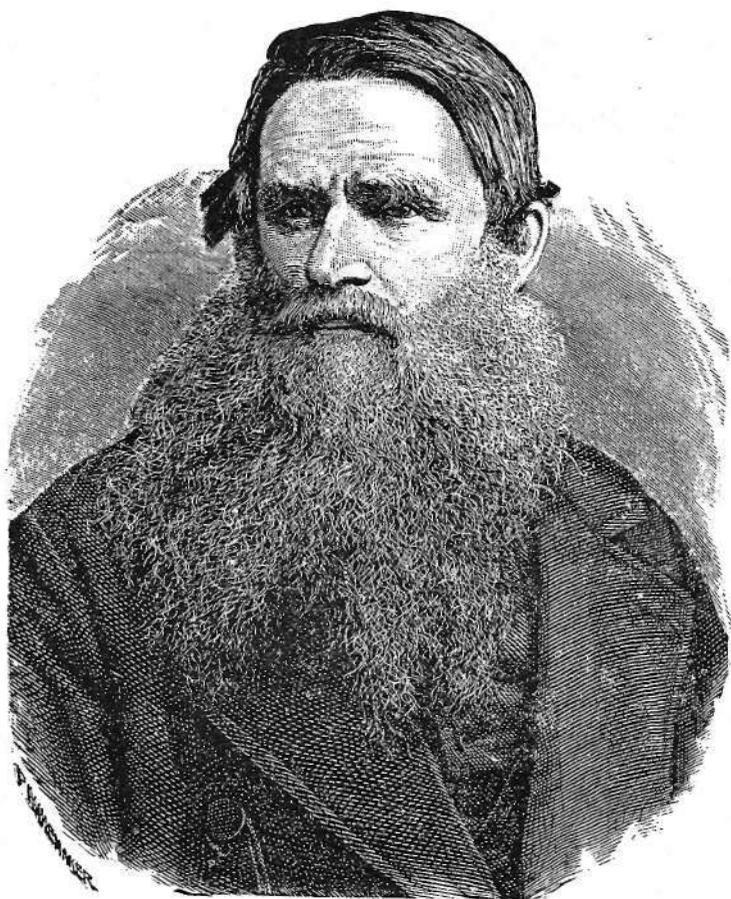
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## DIARIES OF THE JESUIT MISSIONARIES

### NOTE

Numerous typographical and spelling errors occur throughout the original of this Number due, we understand, to the translator not having had the opportunity of reading the proofs. As this is a facsimile reprint the errors are regrettably perpetuated.



*Fr. Depelchin S.J.*

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of the Jesuit Missionaries

at Bulawayo 1879 - 1881

Translated from the French by M. Lloyd B.A. Mod. (T.C.D.)

Publication No. 4

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Box 8268 Causeway, Salisbury,

1959

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## WHO WAS WHO IN THE DIARIES OF 1879/81.

Fr. Depelchin Belgian Superior of the Zambezi Mission 1879 - 85.  
Extracts from his Diary follow 1 to 5; 9.

Fr. Croonenberg S.J. Belgian.

Extracts from his Diary follow 6 - 8; 10 - 27.

Fr. A. Law English Priest on Mission to Gazaland. Died near Chipings 1880.

Fr. A. Terorde S.J. German, born 1844; died on Zambezi 1880.

Bro. F. de Sadeleer S.J. Belgian (c 1850 -1920).

Bro. Nigg, Liechtenstein member of Zambezi Mission.

King Lobengula (c 1840 - 1893). Last Monarch of Matabeleland. Befriended Mission.

One of his Queens, XWALIE, daughter of Chief Mzila, married the King in 1879.

NJINA, woman of much power; executed.

SOMAIA, Induna guarding frontier.

Ladgi, Chief Minister to King.

WILLIAM, Chief Witchdoctor to the King.

Sir Bartle Frere, High Commissioner for H.R. Majesty at the Cape 1877-80.

Mr J.S. Moffat (1835 - 1918). Son of Rev. Robert Moffat.

Rev. CD. Helm: L.M.S. Missionary at Hope Fountain 1875.

Rev. and Mrs Sykes at Inyati Mission 1859 - 1887.

Mr T.M. Morgan ex Missionary (at Shilo 1875) died 1884.

Mr. John Lee. Landowner Mangwe.

Some Traders at Gu - Bulawayo - Messrs. Martin, J. Fairbairn, H. Grant and F. Greite (who sold his house at Sauerdale to the Mission).

# Diaries of the Jesuit Missionaries

at Bulawayo 1879 - 1881

## INTRODUCTION

*In 1875, Monseigneur Ricard, Bishop of Grahamstown, went to Rome to speak about the pressing need for missionaries in the southern portion of Central Africa. The College of Saint Aidan was opened in Grahamstown in 1876 by the Jesuit Fathers, and, the following year arrangements were made to establish missions to the north of the Limpopo River in the country of the Matabele, the Abagasa, the Marotses, and throughout the basin of the Upper Zambesi River.*

*It was decided that the head of the Mission would be Father Depelchin, a Belgian priest who had spent eighteen years in India. With him were three other Belgians: Father Croonenberghs and Brothers De Sadeleer and De Vylder; three Germans: Father Terorde, Father Fuchs and Brother Nigg; two Italians: Father Blanca and Brother Paravicini; and two English: Father Law and Brother Hedley.*

*At the end of December, 1878, Father Depelchin and Father Terorde, accompanied by Brothers Nigg and Paravicini, left Brussels for London where they bought tins, cooking utensils, scientific instruments, and so on. They sailed for South Africa on the 2nd January, 1879, reaching Grahamstown on the 13th March, where they were joined by the rest of the members of the expedition.*

*They spent some weeks in Grahamstown making their final preparations, and finally set off for the north on April the 16th, with four ox-waggons, called Ignatius, Xavier, Claver and Britto. The whole of Grahamstown turned out to see them leave and to wish them God-speed.*

*They reached Kimberley on the 12th May and crossed the Limpopo, the southern border of the mission, on the 17th July. The boundaries of the mission were to be: to the north; the 10th degree south of the equator, to the east the Portuguese possessions and the country of Zanzibar; to the west, 22 degrees East of Greenwich; and to the south, the Limpopo River.*

*Anxious to reach the country of the Matabele before the rainy season, they pushed on northwards, reaching Shoshong, the residence of King Khama, on the 23rd. On August the 17th, four months after their departure from Grahamstown, they reached Tati, described as the old frontier of the Empire of the Monomotapa.*

*As the rainy season was now approaching, it was decided to call a temporary halt at Tati, in order to rest and refit. Father Depelchin, how-*

ever, decided to take advantage of the last few weeks of the dry season in order to push on to Gubuluwayo with Father Law and Brother Sadeleer, so that they might meet Lobengula.

\*

*This Mission established at Pandematenka (65 miles West of the present Wankie and 48 miles almost South of the Victoria Falls) was described by Sr. Ralph Williams as "an abominable death trap". Yet for several years, these Jesuits there laboured to found an outpost of Christian influence in the heart of Africa, until their mission was withdrawn. When Sir Ralph and his wife reached it on 25th July, 1883, Pandematenka was "the most distant and isolated of all Jesuit Missions".*

*After visiting the Falls from Pandematenka and suffering under a serious bout of malaria, Sir Ralph left by ox-wagon on 1st December, 1883 recording:*

*"Heartily sorry to part with the members of the Mission to whom we owed so much and who laughingly protested at the thanks we sought to pour upon them. We had reason to bless the fate that had brought these good priests and brothers into this far off land. Neither my wife nor I will ever hope, or care, to find our fellow-men more kindly, more gentle, more self-denying or more simply and genuinely helpful than were those who constituted this Jesuit Mission".\**

*\*Sir Ralph Williams. "How I Became a Governor" (1913) pp 97-98 and 105.*

N.B. The extracts chosen are those which deal with the activities of these missionaries during their sojourn in Gubuluwayo. The following sections of the book have, therefore, been omitted:

- (1) The journey from Brussels to Grahamstown.
- (2) The journey from Grahamstown, via Kimberley, as far as the borders of Matabeleland.
- (3) The experiences of the missionaries in Tati.
- (4) The adventures of the white hunters in Mashonaland in 1880.

*Maira Lloyd*

## 1. FROM TATI TO GU - BULAWAYO

Saturday, 23rd August — Ramaquoban. Lat. 21deg. 43' south.

We are beginning to penetrate into the heart of Matabeleland. The first impression which we receive is fairly favourable: an excellent road; the forests which stretch to right and left present something far fresher and more luxuriant than the country which we traversed before reaching Tati. A number of hills to southward have an imposing appearance. As soon as we have camped, Brother De Sadeleer sets off, rifle on his shoulder, along the edge of the forest, hoping to find some game. Nothing appears; however, in the evening, by moonlight, he thinks he sees some huge birds' nests on a tree. He approaches and finds, not nests, but five guinea-fowl, fast asleep on the branches. He loads his rifle and shoots two of them, laughing as he puts them in his game-bag. Our dinner for to-morrow is assured.

At 5 o'clock in the morning we set off again, stopping at six-thirty to say Mass and prepare a meal. During the Mass, Father Law holds a parasol over my head to protect me against the rays of the sun. In spite of the difficulties of travel we find the means to celebrate Mass every day. It is our only real consolation in the African desert!...

At eight o'clock we set off again continue our march through the silent forest. Here and there we see antelopes bounding through the bushes. At last we reach the banks of the Ramaquoban which we cross at eleven o'clock. Always the same story: the Ramaquoban is a river of sand; we shall have to dig down in order to get water.

Sunday, 24th August. — Umpakwi. Lat. 21deg. 6' south.

We leave the banks of the Ramaquoban at 5 o'clock in the evening and at 9.30 we cross the Umpakwi. There are a few pools of water in the river: we are progressing. The bed of the river and both its banks are strewn with stones of every shade. One would only need to classify them to have a fine amateur mineralogical collection. Nothing surprising about this: we are travelling through the ancient empire of the Monomotapa, that is to say the country of precious stones. One can see auriferous quartz and one can see specks of gold shine in the sand.

Monday, 25th August. — Kwesinyama.

We have stopped on the banks of the Kwesi. The bed of the river is partially covered with reeds; here and there in the sand a pool of water.

It is here usually that travellers stay in quarantine awaiting the pleasure of His Majesty Lo Bengula to send the permission to advance. One cannot penetrate into the interior without the authorisation of the king. We are naturally a little anxious: travellers have found themselves stopped at the frontier for several weeks. — The country is very picturesque, and the road which we are following, bordered on both sides with hills and rocks of fantastic shapes, has been given by English travellers the name of "Lovely Gorge". At the foot of steep slopes, we see a large flock of

sheep and goats, tended by some children, who come along immediately to talk with our Kaffirs. The smallest child in particular appears very intelligent. They all chatter, laugh and joke with an air of innocence: but, as night falls, one of them, with incredible dexterity, carries off the coat of our Kaffir "leader" Tom! We had been told that the Matabele are clever thieves, and that one must always watch out. It would appear that, no sooner are we in contact with them, than the game begins.

Tuesday, 26th August. — Same place.

We have notified the "induna", or chief of the district, of our arrival. Without delay, the induna, accompanied by two warriors armed with guns and assegais, comes to greet us; he has seen our messenger pass, and Lo Bengula will doubtless send a reply to-morrow to our request.

Profiting by this meeting, Tom explains to the induna about the theft of his coat, and demands justice. "I must have my coat," says he, "or the death of the thief." The accused is brought and bursts out crying, saying that he is as innocent as a new-born babe. He hasn't even seen Tom's coat! The discussion becomes heated on both sides; it could have grave consequences, because, among the Matabele, the only punishment inflicted by the law is death. So, to put an end to the unfortunate affair, Father Law insists on taking off his own coat and giving it to Tom! *Causa finita est!* The incident is closed.

The induna, who occupies a position of trust at the frontier, is called Somaia. He is a man of great muscular strength; he seems pleasant enough. In accordance with the custom of the country, he wears a leopard skin around his loins; his chest is bare; from his shoulder is slung a little box containing powder and shot for his gun.

For head-dress, a small band of leather, fastened to his hair, encircles his head like a crown. Inside this oval crown the head is shaved. This singular halo is the distinctive mark of an "indoda", or grown-up man: it is called "issigook".

We offer the induna a fine woollen blanket and a handkerchief in vivid colours. After a visit of some hours — the African, like the Indian, is never pressed for time — we give him, at his request, a piece of meat, which he immediately passes to one of the warriors to cook on the fire. Afterwards, he accepts a cup of coffee and a glass of liqueur. Thereupon, his face lights up: he is delighted and goes off well pleased.

Wednesday, 27th August. Same place.

The expected message from Lo Bengula has still not arrived; we are going to make an excursion into the surrounding hills, to get an idea of the aspect of the country.

Here the villages are numerous, and from the hill-tops we see cultivated valleys stretching out before us. The only crops appear to be maize and millet which form the chief food of the inhabitants of these countries. One may say that the countryside has a rare beauty. The lion seems to have deserted this district; on the other hand, at night one hears the

howling of wolves, of hyenas and of jackals which come in troops to prowl around our waggon.

The kraal of this induna is situated among a great mass of rocks, behind which the huts seem to hide. The reasons are probably strategic; and indeed it would be difficult for the enemy to venture along these zigzag paths and to attack troops so admirably protected by ramparts of granite and fighting on their own ground. Once inside this sort of labyrinth-village, I do not know how we should have found our way back to our camp, if the inhabitants had not guided us. The people seem simple and kindly, and I hope that we shall succeed in making many converts.

To-day the induna Somaia has sent us two young men to ask us to bring our waggon as far as his village a half-league away. Is this kindness, or strategy? Our dear Induna covets, I strongly suspect, our gifts of calico ... of meat... of coffee... of sugar... and especially of brandy... so be it!

Thursday, 28th August. — Kwesiniami.

We leave the banks of the Kwesi and we advance as far as the village of the induna, Kwesiniami, where we camp at the foot of a hill which rises like a pyramid to a height of seven hundred feet.

During the night, the wind blows with great violence and brings rain. The bad weather obliges us to take refuge in a cave in the mountain in order to say Holy Mass. There, with a rock for our altar, and the seven hundred foot pyramid of granite as our canopy, we offer to God the august sacrifice of Calvary! At this solemn moment it seems to me that the mountain itself, together with the holy Angels who surround us, trembles with joy and adores the eucharistic God: Hosanna in excelsis!

At about 9 o'clock, a crowd from the village surrounds our wagon to sell us eggs, milk and melons. There is enough milk for a hundred persons, and we are only five! In exchange for this abundance of foodstuffs, they ask us for bits of material, a "scrap" of handkerchief or some trinkets. One Kaffir rogue held in his hand a bowl of wood which he had hollowed out, and he asked for a handkerchief as the price of his work. Would one believe it — for the entire day he pleaded his cause, laughing and sporting; ceaselessly, he invented fresh arguments to overcome our resistance.

"What;", said he, "the piccanins have been given pieces of "limbo" (material), and I, a grown young man, cannot obtain anything! Certainly, the Fathers do not like me! The Fathers hate me!"

Father Law replies that he likes him very much.

"Oh yes," continues the young man, pointing to a head adorned with bright material, "you like him, you like that other one over there; but me, you don't like me at all;"

In the end, we had to give in to this spate of eloquence: he was given a handkerchief. No sooner had he received it, than he fashioned it into a most charming head-dress; then he gambolled around crying: "Oh! I must show this to the village!" and darted off like a streak of lightning, singing, dancing, brandishing his assegai and telling everybody that he had been given this beautiful handkerchief by the white men. What a child-like people!...

During the day, we see a woman with a calabash on her head, approaching the waggon. It is the wife of the induna; and she asks for trinkets in exchange for her big calabash. Naturally, we spare nothing in order to please this great African lady, and we fill her two hands. Madame Induna glances first at the trinkets; then, turning towards us with an arch smile, she says:

"What? Only this much for the wife of an induna? Pah! Pah!" And then all the women with her open their eyes wide, and repeat the refrain in chorus: "Pah! Pah! What? Only this much for the wife of an induna?"

To appease this naughty creature, we add a vivid handkerchief and a magnificent purse in the shape of a fish. On seeing the fish, Madame Induna gives a cry of terror and recoils a pace or two. She thought that the purse was a crocodile, an animal which the Matabele abhor as though it was an evil spirit. She thought we were bewitching her and that she would be condemned to death. There was a great fuss and Somaia himself came along to see what was wrong.

Pale with anger and fear, he comes to us, pushes away the purse with an air of indignation and asks for an explanation. Quite innocently, we find that, all of a sudden, we have become witch-doctors! In order to dispel the fears of the induna, we say to him, laughing: "That this toy is a fish and not a crocodile! That he is silly to mistake a fish for a crocodile! That, in any case, the fish is only a piece of silk and is not bewitched at all." Our words are in vain: it is impossible to overcome the qualms of the captain! Finally, unable to reason any further, we present him with a glass of brandy. Who would believe it? This argument has a magic power: fears, qualms, all disappear in a moment! I would never have thought that brandy would be so powerful a remedy for dispelling qualms of conscience.

Friday, 29th August. — Same place.

The royal messenger has at last arrived: he announces that Lo Bengula, happy to meet us, has opened the road to Gubuluwayo for us. The letter is written by Mr. Fairbairn, who seems very favourably disposed towards us.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, we stop in the middle of a forest where there is good pasture for our oxen. Here, for the first time, we pick and taste an excellent fruit, most refreshing, rather like a large orange: the Boers call it "lepper"; properly cultivated, it could appear with honour at a royal table. About 5 o'clock we set out again. Two Kaffirs, sent by the king to protect us on the road, join us. But this guard is more of a burden than a protection. Extra men to feed, and, their task finished, we shall not be rid of them without giving them many gifts.

Sunday, 30th August. — Mangwe. Lat. 20deg. 45'.

This morning we have reached the plateau which dominates the Mangwe. Here lives Mr. Lee, a rich landowner who has a fine farm and many flocks of sheep. On Mr. Baines' map the farm is called Lee's Castle.

In Belgium one would describe it as a large cottage. Travellers usually pitch their tents in front of Lee's Castle and stop for the day. Mr. Lee resembles the Boers of the Transvaal. While still a young man, he came into this country in the train of Mosilikatsi.

He became a close friend of the conqueror and obtained the land which he cultivates on the banks of the Mangwe. He speaks Zulu fluently. Knowing so much about the ways and customs of the country, he has been able to give us detail explanations about various customs. Thus, the little tuft of hair which we had noticed on the heads of some of the women, designates a widow. The king's wives, as a mark of dignity, have a red circlet, about the size of a five franc piece, on the top of their head. According to him, the religion of the Matabele is nothing but an uncivilized fetishism. In a mountain cave, there is a calabash dressed as a puppet, which the people adore as the son of God. Here, the reign of the devil appears principally as witchcraft, one of the powerful methods used by the king to govern his people. He undertakes nothing without the advice of his soothsayers; although an unbeliever himself, he submits himself to all the magic transactions and to all the decisions imposed upon him by the witchdoctors initiated into the mysteries of this infernal art. Doubtless, later on, we shall be able to give you some interesting details about all this.

Mr. Lee's farm is situated on the ridge between the Limpopo and the Zambesi. After Lee's Castle, the road begins gently to descend the southern slope of the basin of the latter river. We pass a small river called Tlapa-Baloi, or the Sorcerer's Stone; then we cross the Matoppo Hills, a labyrinth of granite rocks, and we arrive at last on the banks of the Koumala River.

Monday, 1st September. — Koumala River.

We are now only a dozen miles from the residence of Lo Bengula. We are making a final effort, despite the weariness of our oxen, and we are reaching one of the goals of our long journey, the royal kraal of the powerful chief of the Matabele.

Tuesday, 2nd September. — Royal Kraal of Ishoshani.

Reached Lo Bengula's kraal about 3 o'clock in the afternoon; we have pitched our tent at Ishoshani, also called Amatje Amthlopi or Amantshoni Slope, that is to say, the White Rocks.

## 2. RECEPTION AMONG THE MATABELE

Ishoshani, Royal Kraal, 6th September, 1879.

On Tuesday, the 2nd September, in the afternoon, we reached the residence of Lo Bengula, at the royal kraal of Ishoshani or the White-Rocks.

During the evening, Mr. James Fairbairn, who seems entirely devoted to our cause, called upon us to bid us welcome. The next day, 3rd

September, at ten o'clock in the morning, accompanied by Mr. Fairbairn, Father Law and I went to greet the king and to offer him our gifts. These consisted of a fine Martini rifle, which we had bought in London, a music-box, two fine blankets and some trinkets.

We placed these presents in front of the opening of the royal hut, and soon we had the pleasure of seeing Lo Bengula looking with satisfaction at all these brilliant objects spread out in front of him. However, it must be said, the prince had only a moment or two for this inspection, because he was busy breakfasting, tearing with his teeth a vast quantity of meat which had just been served to him. This famous king, of muscular build, was dressed in the most extreme simplicity: lying on the ground in his hut, he rather resembled the cyclops Polypheme, stretched out in his cave.

In these circumstances, it will be understood that we could hardly talk for long with the chief of the Matabele. We said to him as politely as possible that we would return another day with Mr. J. Fairbairn, to explain to him the letters of introduction which we had received from Sir Battle Frere, High-Commissioner for Her Britannic Majesty, and from Mr. Bailie, Surveyor-General at Kimberley, a close acquaintance of the king.

Two days later, the 5th September, Mr. James Fairbairn having returned from Gubuluwayo, we set out together for the royal kraal to see whether this would be a more opportune moment to speak to His Majesty.

On the way, we went to greet the king's sister, a woman of great power in the Matabele tribe. Both in features and in stoutness she greatly resembles her brother. When we arrived at her hut, she looked out at us, on her hands and knees, through the small opening which formed the entrance, and smiled graciously at us. She begged us to enter the enclosure adjoining her hut, and said to Mr. Fairbairn that if he went away, she would give him no more beer. So we entered the enclosure, and there we found, seated in the Kaffir fashion, a daughter and a niece of the king: they were busy making the little red circlet which the married women of the royal family wear on their heads.

We greeted the princesses with courtesy. Then both of them, in a chorus, asked Mr. Fairbairn, quite unceremoniously, when he was going to marry them. The latter was obviously far from expecting such a point-blank proposal; and, although accustomed to the habits of these people, Mr. Fairbairn was completely astounded by their audacious question. However, he was not disconcerted, but burst out laughing. After this little incident, we said good-bye and went to sit in the shade of a neighbouring hut where we were brought a large urn of kaffir beer. As soon as we had settled ourselves, the king's sister joined us. Without any ceremony, she squatted down with us and, after having a few large gulps of the "tywala" beer, she passed the urn around. This beer is most refreshing and rather resembles cider; made with fermented maize, it is thick and very nutritious. I shall not describe the princesses' clothes: they did not at all differ from those of the rest of the people. It is a dress which is reduced to the most simple expression. After we had talked for a half an hour with the king's sister, a person both kind and intelligent, we were told that Lo Bengula was awaiting us in his "kotla", or chief hut.

The royal palace is similar to all the dwellings of the Matabele. These round clay cabins are about twenty feet in diameter. The roof is supported by a tall pole placed in the middle; they have no windows, and only receive light through the cracks in the walls and through the low entrance. The latter is an opening about 80 centimetres high and 80 centimetres across.

We entered the king's hut by crawling on our hands and knees and we took up our positions close to the entry. His Majesty was on the far side of the kotla, whilst about ten ladies, adorned with their most brilliant trinkets, sat in a circle opposite to him. The king, seated nonchalantly on a rug, as is his custom, had the Martini rifle which we had given him on the ground in front of him, and was obviously highly pleased with this fine gift. He handled it as lightly as though it were a pen. It is said that he is an excellent shot.

After a few preliminary remarks, I presented to him Sir Bartle Frere's letter, which Mr. Fairbairn was kind enough to translate. Lo Bengula listened with close attention; he examined with admiration the signature and seal of His Excellency. We told him that we would be very happy to live as missionaries among his people and to have a mission-station at Gubuluwayo and another at Tati.

At first he replied, as had also done Khama, chief of the Baman-gwato, that he had enough "abafundisi", that is to say, teachers, missionaries; that for more than twenty years the Protestant missionaries had worked in his country without success: "They have attained nothing", said he, "absolutely nothing: the children don't want to learn, and the grown-ups are quite happy to be as they are."

For four hours we remained in conference, seated on the ground like Kaffirs, talking and joking with the king, who soon became so familiar with me, that he frequently admired my beard and pulled it as a token of friendship; "It is a lion's mane, a veritable lion's mane", said he, laughing.

From time to time, he put his great shaven head outside the kotla to receive the homage of numerous deputations which came to sing and dance around the hut, for the occasion of the marriage of their chief to the daughter of the king of the Abagasa.

During this long session we were presented with a dish of excellent meat: our pocket knives were most useful during this repast, which we had the honour of eating with His Majesty the king! Lo Bengula continually reproached us with drinking so little, whilst, faithfully adhering to the etiquette of the court, we made valiant efforts to empty the great urn of tyawala which was passed from mouth to mouth.

After the meal, they wished to give us an agreeable surprise. Three men, strangely garbed in dirty woollen blankets, glided into the hut, and, by order of the king, they took their places close by the entrance. They were witch-doctors.

No sooner had they seated themselves, than they began to fiddle about in a mysterious fashion under their blankets. The king laughingly asked Mr. Fairbairn what was going to appear. "Oh," said Mr. Fairbairn, "I suppose we shall soon see a snake." At these words, all the ladies present hastily wrapped up their feet, to protect them against the bites of the venomous reptile.

After a number of magical gestures, there appeared, not a snake, but a calabash dressed as a puppet! "This statuette", said the witch-doctor's, "is the son of God who speaks to men!" Never have I seen a more gross or more childish fraud. The witch-doctors whispered together in a mysterious manner. Then one of them, asking a question, said to the puppet: "You are in the presence of king Lo Bengula... is his heart pure?" And immediately he pressed his thumb against the blanket, and we could hear a faint whistle which was supposed to be an affirmative reply.

We could with difficulty refrain from laughing, and Mr. Fairbairn said to the prince: "It is not possible that you believe such a fraud. Will you permit me to show you the instrument hidden beneath the blanket." The king, whilst laughing at the thing, would not allow the deceit to be exposed. The witch-doctors noticed our incredulity: they hastened to put another question to the calabash, and asked if it did not wish to withdraw. The king immediately replied: "Hamba gathli! ... Go in peace." As soon as they left, the witch-doctors themselves burst out laughing about the joke which they had played on us.

After this long audience, we left also, without having received any definite reply. However, Mr. Fairbairn assured us that we had been very well received. Lo Bengula likes to keep people in suspense and to give his decision only after several weeks of deliberation. But the favour once granted is irrevocable. Let us hope that God will have pity on these poor people, and that He will deign to open their eyes to the light of truth.

### 3. KING LOBENGULA

The White Rocks, 10th September, 1879.

Last Sunday, September the 8th, Lo Bengula came to call on us, at the place where we have camped with our waggon. As Mr. Fairbairn had returned to Gubuluwayo, two leagues away from here, our Kaffir drivers acted as interpreters. The king came into our tent bearing an assegai in his hand. He has a gigantic build and possesses all the external qualities suitable for the chief of a barbarous tribe. He spent over an hour with us and accepted a glass of lemonade and some biscuits. He begged us to give some brandy to his squire, whilst refusing it for himself.

The king has treated us with much kindness, listening with attention to our proposals. But he repeated the same arguments used on the occasion of our first meeting with him. As he said that the children and the young people did not wish to learn to read and write. We replied that we could teach them other things, for example, the trades of blacksmith, painter, agricultural labourer etc., etc.. Lo Bengula then became thoughtful; fixing eyes on our waggon, he said to me that he would like to buy it. Thereupon, I replied that I had no intention of selling it to him; but that if he would give us the authority to live among his people, it would give me much pleasure to make him a present of our waggon. He seemed most pleased with this reply, for, obviously, he greatly desires to have the waggon.

After wishing us a pleasant sojourn at Ishohani, the prince left us, and returned to his hut, walking with a most majestic air: his herald-at-arms followed him, singing the king's praises in a sort of litany which had obviously been learnt by heart.

The next day, Monday, the king's brother arrived at our tent. "Monsieur" was no more clothed than the king himself, except that he wore a large straw hat. He sat down beside me unceremoniously and began to sing in the most free and original fashion. Truly, these Matabele are like children; and, like children also, they are real beggars, continually asking us for something: "Tousa! Tousa!... A small gift, please, a small gift!..." The queens also came to our camping site, asking for a handkerchief, some coffee, trinkets, calico, etc., etc.. All day long we are besieged by beggars; you could not guess how they try our patience.

The day before yesterday, there occurred an event which might have had grave consequences: you can judge for yourself.

The child of a Swedish trader called Jansen, who is living here, had the misfortune to break an earthenware dish belonging to the king, a dish which a slave was taking to the fountain for water. This accident made the king and his people extremely angry. The poor Europeans were trembling for their lives. Had the crime of breaking a royal dish been committed by a native, the prince would immediately have inflicted a most dreadful punishment upon him, perhaps even death. Lo Bengula sent for the trader and his wife, and shook them vigorously with his great fists: the people, hearing of the king's actions, might well have maltreated the poor wife.

Then Mr. Helm, one of the Protestant ministers, came with his colleagues to Lo Bengula's kraal to inform him, respectfully but firmly, "that the king must never lay his hands upon a European; such an action might excite his people and lead to the massacre of all the Europeans established in his country. Such an occurrence would, without any doubt, bring grave retribution to the king and to his people."

Agreeing with this, the king decided that, should such an occurrence happen again, it would be judged and settled by the European settlers. It would appear, however, that the trader Jansen will have to leave the country.

To-day, Lo Bengula sent us some mutton, doubtless to show us that the events of the day before yesterday have not in any way diminished his regard and affection for the Europeans.

We have had a long talk with the Protestant ministers: these gentlemen have treated us with the greatest courtesy.

We hope soon to receive a favourable reply from the king. Mr. Fairbairn, who is a great friend of the king, is devoted to our cause; he directs our business with great skill; he is a diplomat of the highest order. Recently, in a conversation with the king, Mr. Fairbairn introduced an idea which made a great impression on the king.

"Would it not be pleasant," said Mr. Fairbairn to Lo Bengula, "when your rifle is out of order, when your waggon has broken down, to find among your own people men who would be able to fix them? Well! the new missionaries will teach these trades to your Matabele."

By this you will understand that one of the best means of entering a little into the minds and hearts of these barbarous tribes, is to teach

them, with a devotedness which is proof against all trials, the elements of the arts which are useful in life. We must drag these people away from their savagery, that is to say, from laziness, from improvidence, from a complete lack of industry; we must teach them in a practical manner to enjoy the fruits of Christian civilization and of Christianity. They are completely materialistic; it will therefore be necessary to provide first for their material needs, in order to lead them subsequently little by little towards the life of the spirit, towards the sublime virtues of Christian morality.

In order to attain this object, we shall need a number of good lay brothers, capable of teaching the principal trades... a good blacksmith, a gunsmith, a carpenter and joiner, a clockmaker... these would be useful indeed. In short, we shall need to train them as workers, instead of soldiers living by rapine and booty. Later on, when we are better established, some Sisters could come out to teach the Kaffir girls the arts of housewifery.

From my own experiences, and from what I have learned from the Europeans who live in Gubuluwayo, this town, built at 5,000 feet above sea level, has a climate which is most favourable to white people, its healthiness being doubtless due to its great altitude. If we could establish ourselves here, it would be a veritable sanatorium, such as there are in India, to cure the missionaries who contract tropical diseases and fevers on the infected banks of the Zambesi and its tributaries to south and north.

#### 4. "A TRULY BARBAROUS NATION"

Gubuluwayo, 22nd September, 1879.

For more than a fortnight now we have been as it were attached to the court of king Lo Bengula. It is truly an honour with which we would be glad to dispense. But we must submit to circumstances. The celebrations which are to accompany the marriage of the prince to the daughter of Umsila are being prepared with much activity. Every day we see fresh deputations arrive from the outlying districts, coming to congratulate Lo Bengula and to bring gifts. Huts appear all around like magic; the town extends beneath our very eyes.

Yesterday, I witnessed a most unusual dance, rather like a military exercise. To my great astonishment, ten dancers carried on their heads, as an ornament, a heavy volume whose pages fluttered in the breeze. This volume was nothing less than the Protestant Bible! How dreadful that a Bible should serve as a plume in the head-dress of the Kaffirs!

They tell us that the marriage will take place either to-day or to-morrow. No one knows exactly when; in a government such as this, everything is done by surprise:: nothing is announced in advance.

Meanwhile we are obliged to follow the capricious ways of this redoubtable monarch whom the Matabele honour as though he were a god.

Despite the severe manner in which he governs his subjects, Lo Bengula is, in private, most affable and accessible. He is good-hearted, and I do not doubt that, if only he could follow the principles of Christianity,

he would be a wise and just king and a father to his people. Now, like his predecessors, he has no light to guide him but the arts of witchcraft.

Before every important decision, surrounded by his witch-doctors, he consults the fates, and, in accordance with the reply or the inspiration which he is supposed to receive, he gives orders to his ministers who obey him with an absolute promptitude and faith. The mysterious spell of magic and the terror inspired by the power of life and death which lies in the hands of the sovereign — these are the two great motive powers of his government. The people believe that Lo Bengula, by his magic arts, can bring rain or fine weather. As for himself, as he explained to the Europeans, he does not believe in magic; but how, without the aid of magic, could he govern his people? They are a superstitious people who see witch-craft in every accident. If the king was not there to discover and punish the guilty ones, all his prestige would vanish and he would cease to be king.

A few days ago, the king's sister, who often comes to visit us, became ill. Well! the Europeans who have lived here for several years, assure us that, had she died, a great number of persons would have been tortured, for having cast a spell on the princess! Is not this reign of Satan in all his ugliness a horrible thing?

Yesterday, during a walk around Gubuluwayo, Mr. Martin, an English trader, showed us the place where, a few months earlier, the father of a family, accused of having bewitched a neighbour, was put to death with his wife and children. The executioner, after having killed the father with a blow of a "kerrie" (a club carried by the Kaffirs) and burnt his hut, went to meet the wife; she, knowing nothing of what had happened, was returning quietly from the fields with her three children. The executioner walked with her awhile, talking in a friendly way; then, suddenly, he gave her a blow on the head with his kerrie. The poor woman fell dead. The child which she carried at her back and the two others who followed her were killed in the same manner. The corpses of the victims, left unburied, became the prey of wolves and jackals. With my own eyes I saw the skulls and whitened bones of this unhappy mother and her children, beside the path where they were so horribly assassinated.

For the smallest offence, the punishment is death. They seem to know no other form of punishment.

A few days ago, at nightfall, some Matabele came to talk close to our waggon and to warm themselves by our fire. Brother De Sadeleer was preparing supper. Intent on his work, the Brother bent over the fire, and then felt the hand of a Kaffir pass over his head. Quickly he stood up. Alas, it was too late! Both his hat and the Kaffir disappeared together. Soon the matter was reported to Lo Bengula: "What!" said the king, "why did the white man not take his rifle and shoot the thief? This Kaffir was a wolf who should have been killed at once."

So you see, we are here in the midst of a nation which is truly barbarous, where the devil seems to make game of the life of these poor savages.

## 5. ORGANISATION OF THE GOVERNMENT

A word now about property and about the organization of the government in this country.

The right of ownership is scarcely known. The king is the sole and supreme proprietor of the territory and of its riches. However, he recognizes a certain subordinate right in his subjects. As the chief wealth of the country consists of cattle, one can classify property in the following manner:

- 1) The king's personal cattle. — These are very numerous and are distributed throughout the various districts, guarded by the king's servants.
- 2) Government cattle. — These serve to feed the army in time of war and to feed the guests at the great national celebrations. The cattle are then killed by order of the king; and he himself presides over the distribution of the meat to the people. On such occasions, beer or tyawala is brought from the various districts and distributed to the people under the surveillance of the king. During these celebrations of the marriage of the king to the eldest daughter of Umzila, we witness every day this practical example of the royal power.
- 3) Privately owned cattle. — With the exception of the indunas, few private persons own many cattle. In this country riches are dangerous. A rich proprietor would see himself accused of witchcraft and condemned to lose both his herds and his life.

The administrative organization of the kingdom is of the utmost simplicity. The territory comprises four great military divisions, commanded in time of war by four generals, the king being, naturally, the commander-in-chief of the whole army. These four divisions of Matabeleland supply about 10,000 men, armed with assegais (spears), kerries (clubs), shields and some old rifles. Each military division is subdivided into districts. At the head of each district presides an induna or captain, whose office is hereditary. After the king and the big cattle owners, the most powerful men in the kingdom are the indunas, who form, as it were, the aristocracy of the country.

Gubuluwayo, 15th October, 1879.

God be praised! Our affairs are going well. Providence is watching over us, and seems to assure us, despite the many obstacles which must naturally arise, a happy future for our cherished mission to the Matabele.

Lo Bengula, having rested awhile from the fatigue of the long and solemn ceremonies of his marriage with the princess Umzila, has at last made his decision, and now asks me to bring our missionaries from Tati to Gubuluwayo. I shall explain the reasons.

Since his marriage with a princess of royal blood, Lo Bengula feels that his gala ox-waggon is not fine enough. The tent which covers it is in need of repair, as well as many other parts of the waggon. He asks us to do him this service, and we take care not to refuse him.

To-morrow, I shall set out with Brother De Sadeleer, to fetch our men from Tati myself. In any case, I want to visit our Fathers and to bring them provisions and words of encouragement and consolation.

Brother Hedley, who was formerly a sailor, carpenter and rope-maker etc., understands sail work and makes tents with great skill; he will work under the direction of Father Law, a former naval officer, and Brother Nigg will help them. Father Croonenbergh, who is our artist, will have the task of decorating the waggon and of making some paintings on the huge canvas which will cover it. His Majesty Lo Bengula will be able to sit proudly in his carriage which will be more beautiful, more richly and artistically decorated than he has ever seen it before.

We are, therefore, in the good graces of king Lo Bengula, and we enjoy also the friendliness of all the European traders in Gubuluwayo.

So, at last, after much anxiety and difficulty, we are on the eve of success. The prince awaits the arrival of my companions with some impatience, as you can guess from what I have said. I expect to reach Tati about the 25th, to stay there a few days, and to arrive back at the capital of the Matabele before the 10th of November.

## 6. FATHER CROONENBERG 'S ACCOUNT

Gubuluwayo, Wednesday the 12th November, 1879.

Latitude south 20deg. 15'; long. E of merid. of Greenwich 28deg. 52'; altitude 1,630 metres. Barom. 676; therm. Cent. 36deg.

A few words first about our journey. The road from Tati to Gubuluwayo is very pleasant and good. Leaving Tati on Tuesday the 28th October, we camped on Wednesday the 5th November on the banks of the Koumala, after having covered in eight days, as though by magic, a distance of 120 English miles. Our two waggons, Francis-Xavier and Britto have bravely done their duty. We had then only 12 miles to cover, before arriving at the king's kraal. He awaited us with impatience.

On the previous day, Tuesday the 4th November, Father Law and three English gentlemen came on horseback to meet us and to bid us welcome on behalf of the king. It appears that I am to be the gunsmith for his arsenal and the decorator of his waggons. You cannot imagine how much Lo Bengula and the white people who are living in the heart of Africa, appreciate these little social talents, which, believe me, are most useful in a savage country. Following the example of missionaries of former days, we shall begin with the arts and trades and we shall hope to finish with science and the works of God.

On the way, at Lee's Castle, the proprietor, Mr. Lee awaited us: he asked me to be good enough to repair several of his rifles. Naturally, I did not refuse, because one can find no artisan here who can do this work.

At the village of Ambakoutameni, several Kaffirs besieged our waggon, showing us their mouths wide open. These poor black people wished to be rid of the toothaches which tormented them. I did not have the time to stop; otherwise I would no doubt have had greater success than had, long ago in Brussels, Mr. and Mrs. Enault, who used to do their work,

as you will remember, doubtless, on the public squares with the noisy accompaniment of a brass band.

In the villages which we passed, all our purchases were made by exchange. It was most curious to see. Troupes of women approached us and presented us with melons, chickens, millet, Kaffir-corn, tobacco, snuff, "ukwai" etc. etc. It was a race to see who would be the first to get rid of her wares. One of them, in exchange for a chicken, asked us for ten coils of iron wire (value 10 centimes); another asked for a piece of cotton material in exchange for a kilo of "ukwai" or a half-hectolitre of millet, and so on.

At last, on Friday the 7th November, in the morning, we reached Gubuluwayo, the famous capital of the Matabele. The previous evening we had camped at Amatsche-Amhlope, otherwise known as Ishoshani, or the royal kraal of Lo Bengula.

The king and the new queen, the princess Umzila, received us with much kindness. Lo Bengula, who had at first considered our missionaries with disfavour, had been afterwards led to better feelings about us by our friends Mr. Fairbairn and Mr. Martin, English Protestant gentlemen who live here. These gentlemen have done us a great service. We are equally in the debt of Mr. Philips, our friend in Tati. He wrote to one of the chief indunas, who had been, in principle hostile to us, telling him that he must receive us as though we were himself, unless he wished to lose the friendship of Mr. Philips. Finally, Father Depelchin's stay here, his goodness, loyalty and straightforwardness, have completely banished the prejudices of Lo Bengula. The powerful chief has granted our requests and accepted the offers which we have made to devote ourselves to the well-being of his people.

I gave to the queen a gift of the beautiful silver crucifix which an elderly relative had given me at the time of my departure. The queen, delighted with this present, invited us into her tent, an honour rarely bestowed and reserved only for indunas.

Father Depelchin, Father Law and Brothers Nigg and Hedley, remained behind at Ishoshani for a few days in order to repair the king's waggon. They have now rejoined us. They are living temporarily in a very small dwelling. As for me, being not yet altogether recovered from my illness at Tati, I am enjoying the kind hospitality of Mr. Martin who treats me like a son, indeed like a spoilt child. From his house, built on the top of the Lion's Head, we have a most splendid view: the great plain of Gubuluwayo stretches out at our feet with its English homes and its hundreds of huts: to the south, we catch glimpses of the Matoppo Hills, and, to the north, of the hills which stretch towards the Zambesi.

Here, in a few words, are the concessions which Lo Bengula is making to us. He has authorised us to live nearby the royal kraal of Amatsche-Amhlope, situated two leagues away from Gubuluwayo. He further allows us to settle in the capital and to acquire there from Mr. Greite, who is leaving the country, a house which the latter is most willing to let us have under most advantageous conditions. Furthermore, he is giving us permission to enter into discussions with Mr. Grant, an English trader, for the transfer of a large piece of land, three leagues from Gubuluwayo, in a beautiful valley, watered by several streams. There we shall try to have some livestock and

cultivate some fields for the maintenance of the Mission. If God is willing we shall have a model-farm, like the old abbeys of the Middle Ages, where we can teach the natives agriculture and its allied trades such as the work of a blacksmith, carpentry, brewing, and the work of a wheelwright, etc. Mr. Grant is most willing to transfer the land to us, in usufruct, on a long lease. The king has also ratified our ownership of the house which we have been occupying in Tati. Finally, Lo Bengula has authorised us to traverse his kingdom as far as the Zambesi, an expedition which we shall not be able to undertake before May or June of next year. It is now the rainy season and the roads are impassable, the rivers are in flood, and the valley of the Zambesi is most unhealthy. We could not acclimatise ourselves there at a time like this. We would be asking for failure and certain death.

As you see, up to now, the good God has visibly protected our work which we have undertaken with the blessing of our Holy Father the Pope, with the generous help of Catholics, with the support of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, and with the divine assistance of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to whom we devote ourselves in a very special manner, both ourselves and our mission.

## 7. MATABELE CUSTOMS

Gubuluwayo, Sunday the 16th November, 1879.

To-day, I am going to give you, in a somewhat haphazard manner, a few details about our Matabele, details which will, I hope, be of interest to you.

Lo Bengula is a veritable giant, more than six feet tall; of athletic build. He is somewhat extremely stout. They tell us that His Majesty weighs one hundred and twenty kilos, and his sister, the princess Njina, one hundred and fifty kilos. Here stoutness is looked upon as a sign of great dignity. The queens and princesses vie with one another as to which of them is the most stout. You can have no idea at all of the digestive powers of the Kaffir dignitaries and of the members of the royal family... They can eat whole quarters of beef at a sitting. Truly one might believe oneself transported to the days of the Trojan Wars and the customs of the heroes of Homer. If you recollect the descriptions of meals in the Iliad, you will have an idea of the feasts of the Matabele.

Unfortunately polygamy is the general rule among these Kaffir tribes. For a very long time, this custom will be an obstacle to their conversion, particularly among the more rich and powerful people. The women, looked upon as slaves, must work without ceasing; the chief occupation of the princesses consists in making bread and beer for the consumption of the royal household. As the Matabele belong to the same race as the Zulus of Cetewayo, you can more or less apply all that you know about the latter to the Kaffirs of Lo Bengula.

Here is a description of the ceremonies which accompanied the marriage of Lo Bengula to the princess Umzila. I have obtained these details from Brother De Sadeleer who was staying at Ishoshani at that time.

For a fortnight before the marriage, most of the king's subjects, Matabele, Makalaka and other subordinate tribes, arrived at the royal kraal from all parts of the country, to congratulate the sovereign and to bring him gifts. Day by day more and more of them arrived, so that the population of the kraal rose from some six hundred men to at least seven or eight thousand men. All these visitors executed warlike dances and military exercises. The king, obliged to feed them all, slaughtered veritable hecatombs of cattle; he gave kaffir beer only to the indunas.

After a fortnight, on the occasion of the new moon, the king and the queen, each accompanied by two oxen and a great crowd of people, came to visit their capital of Gubuluwayo. Then, under the direction of the witch-doctors, at an hour unknown to the public, the king and queen went to a neighbouring kopje. There, in a cave, there is, they say, an idol. The witch-doctors entered the cave and addressed themselves to the Morimo, or great Spirit, pronounced certain magic words, then returned to the king announcing that the marriage had now been celebrated.

After this, the king ceased to feed his subjects; indeed, some of them might well die of hunger before reaching their homes. All of them left Gubuluwayo in great haste and the king returned to his kraal.

Son of the great Mosilikatsi, the founder of the empire of the Matabele, who died on the 5th September 1868 at Intoumbani, Lo Bengula, because of a certain amount of rivalry, did not begin his reign until 1870. His father was buried in a wild valley among great rocks, some 18 miles from here; they are supposed to know nothing of the place of burial. Three of his wives were sacrificed on his tomb and more than three hundred of his slaves were massacred in his honour. Since then, no man has been allowed to visit the funeral valley; it is forbidden, under pain of death, to enter it. It is in this manner that Lo Bengula wishes to honour the memory of his illustrious father. However, the king made an exception of ourselves; he gave to his great friend, Mr. Fairbairn, permission to take me to this dreaded valley this week. I shall make sketches of the best views to send home to Belgium, assured that no mortal man from overseas will ever be able to see the tomb of the celebrated Mosilikatsi.

The Matabele, in their commercial undertakings, are very prone to theft. Although theft is punishable by death, they do not seem to fear this punishment, for the simple reason that they always hope to escape it. Their agility in running is such that they can vie with the best horses. And there are but few horses here.

Two of our "boys," or Kaffir servants, were engaged by us for a period of one year, in return for their keep and also an old rifle, bought in England for 7 shillings, but worth 4 to 7 pounds sterling out here. That evening, while the Fathers were at supper, it was noticed that they had suddenly disappeared; we ran to the waggons and discovered that a good rifle, three woollen blankets, and Father Depelchin's soutane, black coat, shoes and binoculars had disappeared too. All the white people are in a great flutter about it; the news has even reached the ears of the king who has arrived to-day in person to take a hand in the matter and to order the pursuit and punishment of the thieves.

The rainy season began a week ago: every day we have three or four thunderstorms. From the plateau on which Mr. Martin's house is situ-

ated, and which dominates the surrounding hills, we have a most splendid view. These storms are terrifyingly beautiful.

A few days ago, I met a poor leper whose story I must tell you.

Two years ago, a Hottentot called Jan Scheppers, a hunter by trade, was suddenly attacked by leprosy, which soon ate away the fingers of both his hands up to the third joint. His family, finding him a burden, abandoned him in his misery. They even forced him to sell his elephant-gun in exchange for an ox, and the purchasers cut up the ox and ate it before his eyes. Since then the leper, repulsed by all, has wandered alone among the neighbouring rocky hills. Dressed in a sack, wasting away with his illness and devoured by hunger, he sometimes approached the huts; but he was sent away and the doors were closed against him. Not long ago he came to lie down by the hedge surrounding our enclosure. Mr. Martin, my kind host, had pity on him. We dressed him, fed him, and conducted him to some distance from the town; there we built him a hut by a tree, a small hut of pole and dagga, covered with grass, and the servants of the house now bring him food.

The poor wretch is there, calm and resigned in his horrible solitude. Seated in front of his hut, Jean Scheppers contemplates the ground and awaits the eternity which, alas, may not come to him for many long years: because, as a rule, this incurable disease makes very slow progress. I am going to visit the poor Hottentot often, and, by the grace of God, I hope to procure for him the consolation of faith and the rewards of heaven, in exchange for the long suffering of his life on earth.

The price of food is not very high; I have just bought, a few minutes ago, twenty pounds of rice for two handkerchiefs priced at 80 centimes each. A two year old he-goat sells for 5 or 6 shillings in handkerchiefs or trinkets. A fine sheep of 2 or 3 years is worth 10 or 12 shillings. An ox for slaughter is valued at 4 pounds sterling. All the trifles which I was given in Belgium have a great success here; my only regret is that I did not, before my departure, collect more of them. On the other hand, other things are very dear. Why, for example, did I not think of bringing more ammunition: cartridges cost two pounds sterling for 250! ! ! And tinder and steel cost a great price in a country where they do not yet manufacture matches.

As for commerce on a large scale, it would appear that it has greatly lessened for some time now. Five years ago, Matabeleland alone produced more than 80,000 pounds of elephant tusks, valued here at 6 or 7 shillings a pound; they also exported a considerable quantity of ostrich feathers. At the present time it is doubtful if the hunters succeed in collecting 20,000 lbs of ivory. The elephants are moving further away; the ostriches too; besides the breeding of these birds on farms in the Cape gives heavy competition to the hunters. Fearing, and not without reason, that both elephants and ostriches may disappear entirely, Lo Bengula is thinking of restricting hunting permits: a project which would show quite good administrative powers and which would find its place in the realm of political economy.

## 8. CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

I should like to say a word or two about Protestant propaganda in this country. About 1827, Mosilikatsi, then aged 27, shook off the yoke of Tchaka and, followed by resolute bands, entered the Transvaal. Having settled on the banks of the Marico, he received, some years later, about 1833, two visits from the father-in-law of Livingstone, R.M. Moffat, at that time a minister of the London Missionary Society at Kuruman. About 1835 some American missionaries came to settle with his tribe, at Mosega, near the Marico.

In 1837, pushed northwards by emigrating Boers and Zulus, the Matabele left the Transvaal and settled among the Matoppo Hills, after having conquered and subdued the Makalaka, the Mashona, and several other peoples who inhabited these territories. Mr. Moffat was not discouraged; in 1855 he entered for the first time, Moselikatsi's new country and was well received. In 1857, on his second visit, he obtained permission from the chief to bring some missionaries, which he did in 1859. He brought them to Inyati, one of the king's principal royal residences, and settled there as ministers his son, Mr. John Moffat, Mr. Sykes and Mr. Thomas. Since that date, English missionaries have lived among the Matabele; it was they who opened the way to the Boer hunters and to English traders. But from the point of view of Christianising these people, they have not been able to make much advance with the minds and hearts of these savage tribes. They attribute this to the character and social organization of the Matabele. "These people", they say, "are very far from God; the more need they seem to have of the Gospel, the less they seem disposed to receive it. The very foundations of their society are repugnant to Christian principles." However, has this not always been the case in the work for the conversion of barbaric and savage peoples? Yet Christianity, aided by the grace of God, has succeeded in overcoming all obstacles and in transforming the Saxons of Germania, and the Cannibals of Oceania, into Christians whom we know and honour.

We would like to record the kindness of these ministers who have helped our efforts and who have argued in our favour with Lo Bengula, so that he might accede to our requests.

Of the five Protestant ministers who have lived in the country, Mr. Moffat, junior, has returned to England; Mr. Thomas lives at Shilo; Mr. Helm and Mr. Cockin are at Gubuluwayo. Their mission has two fine farms at Hope Fountain, about three kilometres from the town. Mr. Sykes is at Umshlangen or Inyati. They give help and distribute medicine to the natives who ask for it, and they take divine service on Sundays.

These Matabele people are almost always at war or making raids beyond their frontiers. The Impis, or armies, returned to the capital a few days ago: in addition to a large number of wounded, they had lost fifty men. For their own part, they had killed more than three hundred men, carried off prisoners as slaves, and captured many fine herds of cattle.

After two months of illness, my health is rapidly improving, thanks to the kind care of Mr. Martin, our benefactor, thanks too to the kindness of our own Fathers and of the white people who live here. May God reward them a hundredfold for all their kindness to us!

We await with impatience the arrival of the post, due in a week's time. The last post brought nothing either for Father Depelchin nor for myself. It is the first time for a long while that we have had no news from our native land. We recommend ourselves and our work to the prayers and charity of our friends in Belgium.

Gubuluwayo, 27th November, 1879.

It is raining as it rains in the tropics, that is to say, in torrents. We are at 5,200 feet above sea level; the rocky hills around us are not more than 100 feet higher than the plain, yet the clouds reach half-way down their sides. It is a magnificent sight to see these dark clouds advancing in great masses along the valley; first the blue peaks disappear, then the flanks of the hill; finally the whole plain is obscured. We are obliged to rush for safety into the waggon which still serves us as our home. The rain approaches with a roar like that of the waves on the beach. In a few moments the water is six inches deep around us; all the little gullies become torrents, the valley a river, the plain a great lake. Two hours later, when the sun returns to brighten the landscape with its golden rays, I see cranes, herons, swallows, wild duck and crows circling and flying low over this improvised sea. As for the quantity of water poured down, the rain-gauge sometimes shows more than five centimetres in a day. Thanks to the heat — to-day we have varied from 27 to 37 centigrade — the rains bring forth a lush tropical vegetation from the soil formerly burnt hard by the sun. Everything grows as though by the wave of a magic wand!

The Matabele look upon us with the deference which they show to all white people; the English settlers help us a great deal; the king shows us his favour. But our real business, for which we have come here, is the conversion of the people; but as I have already said, this will be a lengthy task. We shall need many missionaries, there is so much to do. This transformation, if the hour of grace has sounded for the Kaffir, will be the work of many years. What will give us the most difficulty is polygamy, which is strongly entrenched in the customs habits of the natives.

How mysterious is the conversion and civilization of a people! For twenty years now, traders and learned men have lived among these hills. Yet among the natives, there is not as yet one black person who has adopted the use of the spade, the shovel or the plough or who has yet built a house of bricks. There years ago the white people built a stone house for the king, similar to the farmhouses in our countryside in Limbourg. Yet the prince prefers to remain in his hut of dung and reeds right next to his European-style palace. Who will regenerate these savages?... Only the Crucifix which, for eighteen centuries has tamed pagan barbarity throughout the world.

The Matabele people are dreadful beggars. After each small purchase: "Tousa, tousa! a present!"... You meet a man or a woman: they greet you... "Tousa, tousa!" "Limbo" (cotton, linen) is the favourite gift; but anything is received with eagerness.

A thing which has caused a great sensation in Gubuluwayo is the royal chariot: a week ago, it made its first appearance before the public, in all its splendour. The canvas tent which completely covers it, was excellently made by Brother Hedley; Father Croonenberghs did the painting and decoration. Lo Bengula spent hours admiring the fine work. He is really delighted. When he saw his coat-of-arms on the front of the waggon — an assegai and a kerrie, crossed, and surmounted by a magnificent sable crown, Lo Bengula could not resist giving a cry of admiration. "Regis ad exemplar", everybody was full of admiration for this marvel of Belgian art. Decidedly, we are becoming the king's favourites.

Lately, Brother Nigg also had a great success with Lo Bengula. Learning that the Brother had a sewing-machine, the king asked him to come to the palace to show the court how one uses this ingenious mechanism. Brother Nigg set off, carrying his machine: he was taken into the royal drawing-room, and placed his machine in the middle of the apartment. The king was seated majestically in an armchair; around him were several indunas and some Europeans; the new queen Kwalila was also there. Brother Nigg was to sew, in a few minutes, three large satchels of leather for holding powder. Our skilful worker did his best. Lo Bengula watched him attentively, following and imitating all the movements of his hands and feet. When the task was finished, the Brother presented him with three satchels beautifully made: the king, full of admiration, cried out in Zulu: "Ah! these English, these English!" — that is the name which he gives to all white people — "how clever and intelligent they are, and yet they must die just like other people!" To show his gratitude, he gave Brother Nigg an excellent meal, asking him to accept some meat and beer from the royal table.

We celebrated Christmas in one of Mr. Greite's stables. Surrounded by all our Fathers and Brothers, by some white people and a few blacks, only a step or two away from the cow-shed, we said Holy Mass. It reminded us of Bethlehem and the first sacrifice of the Infant Jesus, who, at his entry into the world, said to God: "Thou hast not found any pleasure in burnt sacrifices, in sacrifices for sin; thou hast endowed me, instead, with a body."

At midnight, we adored the Infant-God; the altar indeed resembled the manger. To our left was a flock of sheep and goats, to the right a horse, gentle as a lamb; a further off, one could hear the lowing of the cattle. "Cognovit bos possessorem suum et asinus praesepe domini sui." What a scene! And how we prayed for our poor black people and for their benefactors in Europe.

On Christmas Day, I gave the king a present of a magnificent revolver. This fine example of Belgian industry was given to me in Liege, just one year ago. It has a range of 500 metres and is of very fine workmanship. The king, delighted with it, wished to try it out at once. We went off to a little distance from the town. Before trying the revolver, king Lo Bengula gallantly surprised me by demonstrating how they throw the assegai. He seized a long javelin, tipped with iron, and threw it with a vigour worthy of his herculean strength. The assegai plunged deep into the earth more than forty metres away.

After that came the turn of the revolver. Seated on a rock, surrounded by his servants, by the Fathers and a few Europeans, the king took aim at a flock of sheep which were grazing peacefully some four hundred paces away from us. He did not realize that the bullets could reach so far. Great was his astonishment when several sheep fell dead. This little present has given the king much joy. To show me his gratitude, Lo Bengula shook me affectionately by the hand, and called me, laughingly, "Umtagati" or sorcerer.

## 10. A LETTER FROM FATHER CROONENBERGH

Gubuluwayo, the 8th January, 1880.

Thanks be to God, we are enjoying good health in Gubuluwayo: the climate is excellent, even now in summer, in the rainy season which began during the second half of November. The thermometer generally rises from 15 degrees in the morning to 30 degrees in the afternoon. The average temperature of Gubuluwayo is 22 degrees centigrade, rather like the fine climate of Madeira. I can assure you that we find the heat here more bearable than during the dog-days in Belgium. — Tati, on the other hand, seems really unhealthy; Father and Brother Paravicini suffer much from fever at this station.

Our diet is somewhat primitive, but, on the whole, quite passable. Sometimes we eat goat, more often mutton, occasionally soup and vegetables. For the past few days, they have been bringing us some fruit called "amagogol". It is like a plum without a stone, and has a delicate aroma. As the foundation of our meals, we have bread made with maize flour and as liqueur we have black coffee. When we are able to cultivate our land, a league away from here, we shall have milk, potatoes, vegetables, etc.. Meanwhile, we must bless God for preserving our health and giving us our daily bread.

At the moment, we are all studying the language of the Matabele, whose grammar is less difficult than Zulu, from which its vocabulary notably differs. The language is the key to persuasion; without it, here as everywhere, there is no way to work among the natives. Already Father Law can express himself with fluency and no longer needs an interpreter. Lately, he was able to translate and read to Lo Bengula a long letter written to the chief by Mr. Bailie, Surveyor-General at Kimberley. We shall need a little more time to become familiar with the language; only then shall we be able to begin our apostleship by teaching and education, by our own example of work, by more direct relationships with the poor blacks.

I have also been busy, with our Brothers, doing painting and carpentry for Lo Bengula. Already we have restored two of the king's wagons, the first being finished on Christmas day, the second on the 7th January. There is still the third and last which we shall undertake towards the end of the month. The king is delighted with our works of art. He was present during the work, and followed its progress with much solicitude. When it was finished, I said to him "Pelile, Koumalalo! — It is finished,

Sir!" He stretched out his hand and shook mine so hard that I was most uncomfortable. However, I kept my countenance and asked him if I might write his name on the front of the waggon; he nodded his head in agreement, and then I painted a large L on one side, surmounted by a royal crown, and on the other side a large M, initial of Mosilikatsi, the king's father.

Lo Bengula was overjoyed!... he asked me to explain which of the two letters showed the name of his father, and which his own.

As you see, we are beginning to gain the good graces of the king and of the people, trying to do all we can so that we may win them over to Jesus Christ; the Brothers act as leather-workers, carpenters and masons; I am the painter and doctor.

Ophthalmia has recently been rife in Gubulawayo. The king's eldest daughter, Baniai, was suffering from it and I gave her treatment; the chief minister, Lodgi, the most powerful of the indunas, also submitted to my medical treatment; a large number of the savages, looked after by ourselves, have been cured. If only we had a hospital and some sisters, trade schools, etc., etc., I am sure that we could do much for the black people. In assisting the body, we would be able to begin to cure their souls. — But this work will be very difficult, and, without a miracle, we cannot expect very much.

Before coming here, having read a great deal in books both old and modern, I had foreseen the aridity and sterility of the African territories. But I must admit that I was far indeed from forming an exact idea of the truth.

Can you imagine a people given over completely to idleness, drowned in laziness and in all its allied disorders, having practically no conception of divinity, no notion of justice or injustice, and all of whose institutions and customs are diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Gospel! The men smoke and drink all day long, squatting around the kotlas or huts of the indunas and of the "enkosi". This goes on the whole year round, except during the weeks of raids and war upon the neighbouring territories where the Matabele go to carry off cattle and children! The poor women are treated like slaves and condemned to heavy work. With the exception of the king's sister, Njina, and the new queen Kwalila, daughter of Umzila, all the women must work in the fields, make beer and snuff, carry water, etc...

Their belief in witchcraft is also one of the great obstacles to the work of the missionaries. The witch-doctors, called Rain-Makers, in Matabele Tchabatchaba, are all-powerful and it is through them that the king governs. Whosoever embraces Christianity and abandons the superstition of his fathers, runs a great risk of being condemned to death. When shall we be able to undertake the work of their conversion and of the moral improvement of this poor people? Only God can say.

We are not yet sufficiently versed in the customs and superstitions of the Matabele to be able to give a complete and correct account of them. For that, one would need to live among them for a very long time; only then would one be able to sort out their real thoughts about religion, morality and politics.

As I have already said, the king's power is absolute. Sometimes he judges offences with the advice of his chiefs, often he alone pronounces judgement.

There are three varieties of capital punishment:

1) The kerrie. The head of the condemned person is crushed as one would kill an animal in the slaughter-house; or else one squeezes the criminal's head in the cloven trunk of a tree and tortures him with a species of pin-cers until he is dead.

2) The rope, or hanging from a near-by tree, something like Lynch-law in the United States.

3) The pillory. The patient is bound and tied to a tree and abandoned to die of starvation, or to be devoured by wild beasts. The body of the tortured man becomes the prey of hyenas and vultures.

Crimes against the customs of the country are punishment by fire, by mutilation, etc., etc..

The Matabele nation becomes increased largely through war and through raids on the neighbouring peoples. Each year the impis bring back from the adjoining territories, not only great herds of cattle, but also crowds of children, girls and boys, aged from one to twelve years; their fathers are massacred and their mothers reduced to slavery; the boys, on becoming adult, are incorporated into the Matabele nation, and the girls are given in marriage to the indunas.

Here are a few facts which may serve as replies to those who think and say that it would be better to leave these people in their "native happiness".

Last year, an old woman, who had been a member of the household of Mosilikatsi, was found to have in her possession a knobkerrie which had belonged to the late king. This was enough to have her accused of the crime of witchcraft which she could have committed by using this sacred relic. The case was tried before the council of the indunas, and for long months, the poor old creature trembled beneath the threat of a dreadful death. She had been seen near the river: without doubt she wished to "bewitch the crocodile". She owed her reprieve to the intervention of some friends of the late king.

This very morning, two young slave girls, barely 14 years old, were beaten with whips: their bodies were belaboured with blows of a knobkerrie; then they were stoned. The king's wives, the "Amakosigazi" themselves carried out this terrible execution. The only crime of these two poor creatures was that they had attempted to flee from their hard life.

Up to the age of twelve years, the children of Gubulawayo have only milk as food. As soon as they are able to walk, they go together twice a day to the cattle-kraal, and there, under the supervision of Makwekwe, the induna or captain of Gubuluwayo, they take their food, as, long ago, the twins were suckled by the legendary she-wolf of ancient Rome. After the age of twelve years, the adults, both men and women, are no longer allowed to taste either milk or cheese, this food being exclusively reserved for the children.

In the midst of the barbarity of the customs and habits of the Matabele people, we sometimes enjoy the pleasures of social life as known in civilized Europe. Mr. Greite, in whose enclosure we are camping, before

moving into his house, often gathers together for an evening the English gentlemen who live in Gubuluwayo. He invites us also and we spend a pleasant European evening: a cup of tea, some English biscuits, and some lively conversation are the fruits of these gatherings, not forgetting the national anthem, "God Save the Queen", so dear to the ears of the children of Albion; indeed, we Belgians, we also join in heartily in the singing of this religious and patriotic song. Afterwards we return to our waggons, arranged around Mr. Greite's courtyard; for a little while we watch the lights of our friends as they go towards their homes, or rather their woollen blankets. In this country there are no hearths: the cooking is done in the open air, and the temperature is so equable that the houses never need to be heated.

Our relationships with the other white people are most excellent: we visit their houses and their lands. These gentlemen invite us for dinner and send us provisions and fruit, vegetables, beans, potatoes. As a token of our gratitude, I do water-colours for them, landscapes and sketches, showing their houses, their gardens, etc.. They like to send these gifts home to their families in England.

Talking of painting, Father Depelchin, at the request of the king, asked me to do a portrait of queen Kwalila, as well as a sketch representing the celebrations of the "Little Dance", a public and semi-religious ceremony which will take place in two days' time. These pictures are to be sent to the queen's father, chief Umzila, king of the Abagasa Kaffirs, neighbours of the Matabele. Let us hope that this may open a road for the missionaries into a country as yet unvisited by Europeans.

## 11. ANNUAL FESTIVALS OF THE MATABELE

### THE LITTLE DANCE

Gubuluwayo, the 11th January, 1880.

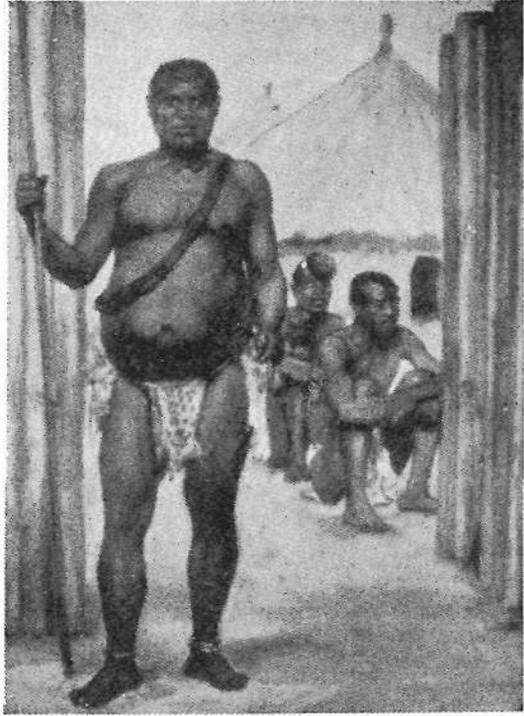
Longit. E. of Greenwich 28 degrees 16' 45"; latit. south 20 degrees 15' 30". — Altitude 1,628 metres. — Barom. 669 to 676. — Therm, cent. 17 degrees a.m., 38 degrees p.m.

Yesterday, the 10th January, we had the festival of the "New Moon of summer", of the Matabele; it is also called the "Feast of the First Fruits," or the festival of the "Little Dance" to distinguish it from that of the "Great Dance" which takes place a fortnight later, in the full moon.

The plateau of Gubuluwayo, raised some 200 metres above the surrounding plain, might be said to resemble the famous hill of Alesia described by Caesar. It is a sort of square with sides more than a thousand metres in length; the incline of its slope varies from one side to another: here, it is quite steep; there, it is more gentle. To the west side of this square, grouped around a great circular space some 500 metres in diameter, are the huts of the people: within, and towards the back, is the palace, the "isikohlo", the thatched huts of princess Njina and of the queens. This august group of buildings is hidden behind a tall palisade

*Lobengula*

from a sketch by E. A. Maund →



*Matabele warriors' dance*



which surrounds it, and against the outside of the palisade are the huts of Makwekwe, steward of the capital, and the royal guards, "madjokas", as well as the king's cattle kraal. Inside this kraal or enclosure, in which the ground level has gradually become raised by the hardened dung, the great religious ceremonies take place.

It is also at the entrance to this kraal that king Lo Bengula presides over the "Little Dance" in the company of the chief witch-doctor. From this entrance as far as the external huts, more than a thousand warriors are ranged in a semicircle: bearing on their heads great black ostrich plumes, their shoulders covered with skins of lion, hyena, jackal or panther, they hold a long branch of mimosa in their hands. They are all completely silent; the sight of this assembly has something both imposing and terrible.

The king appears at the entrance to the kraal; he extends his hand majestically towards the twenty black oxen ranged in front of him, which fill the air with their lowing: the festival begins.

It opens with a solemn dance. Three queens, clad in goatskins fastened with a belt adorned with trinkets, come out of a hut near the kraal, and advance to the middle of the semi-circle. At a given signal, all the soldiers stand to attention with attentive eye and outflung chest. With the right foot, they tap the ground in unison; then, all exactly together and in rhythm, they raise and lower their branches of mimosa. At the same time the thousand warriors begin a savage and powerful chant, monotonous, composed of only two notes, interspersed with a sort of neighing sound which clashes like the sound of a cymbal. To these uniform movements and rhythmic accents correspond the posturings of the queens who execute a warlike dance. This dance, which repeats over and over again the same movements, goes on for two hours; the queens, after a while, are replaced by others. At each of these pauses, all the warriors give a long and piercing whistle. The entire populace, the king, the chiefs, the officers, the thousands of women and children who fill all the far corners of the semicircle, follow and accompany, as it were, the movements and chanting of the soldiers. From a distance, the noise of the festival rather resembles the dull roar of a stormy sea, heard at a distance from the beach.

After some two hours of this rather tiring exercise, the king leaves the entrance to the kraal and advances across the veldt. The "koumalos" or chiefs pass in front of him; bowing deeply, they hand him a branch of green mopani and present to him wheat, maize and the first fruits. The king eats a few grains: then, as a sort of ceremonial purging, he pours water three times over the first fruits of the harvest. Then he retires to the royal palace; a piercing whistle, followed by a great growl, signifying patriotic and religious applause, follow his departure, until he has disappeared from view. And the festival of the New Moon or the Little Dance is finished.

Now the people in their turn are allowed to eat the new season's produce; before the ceremony, before the king had first tasted them, no one would have dared to touch them: the transgression of this law would mean instant death. Who would have thought that in the heart of Africa we would find traces, somewhat obscured admittedly, of primitive religion and of one of the principal festivals of the children of Israel ?

In connection with this ceremony of the "First Fruits" I must say a word about the religion of the Matabele. They seem to have only a very confused idea about a god. They do not pray to their god and they have no real creed. Their entire ritual consists of two Dances: the Little Dance, which I have just described, and the Great Dance, which takes place a fortnight later. At these two festivals, as at the crowning and funeral of their kings, they have three purgings or libations in the form of a sacrifice. The first is in honour of Matchoban, the grandfather of the present king; the second in honour of the great Mosilikatsi, Lo Bengula's father, who, nearly fifty years ago, brought the Zulu-Matabele from the frontiers of Natal to the Matoppo Hills, which they occupy to-day. The third libation is in honour of the reigning prince.

### THE GREAT DANCE

Gubuluwayo, the 12th February, 1880.

To-day I shall give you a few details about the festival of the "Great Dance", or of the "Full Moon" or the "First Fruits". The Little Dance, similar in character, was, as it were, a preparation, a rehearsal for the great festival: the latter should take place always at the full moon of the first month which follows the summer solstice (in the southern hemisphere, the 21st December). This year, however, the full moon was on the 27th January. But the Matabele calendar is not always very accurate, not having been drawn up by knowledgeable astronomers or by clever mathematicians; for this reason, instead of celebrating their Dance at the full moon on the 27th, the Matabele celebrated it only on the evening of January 31st.

King Lo Bengula, delighted with my sketch of the first Dance, has asked me to paint for him, on a very large canvas which he wishes to send to chief Umzila, king of the Abagasa, the principal scenes of the great festival. I have, therefore, made advance preparations so that I may be able to do the work properly. A few days in advance I took my measurements and outlined in the background the magnificent spectacle of the hills which surround Gubuluwayo. In the fore-ground, I have marked the position which the king will probably occupy, together with his chief indunas, from my recollections of the Little Dances. On the eve of the ceremony, I was busy sketching, on the spot, when the king approached me; with much curiosity, he asked me some questions about my technique, and then bluntly inquired about the exact spot on the canvas in which I planned to place himself. I showed him this place of honour: he was proud and delighted, and his royal face beamed with pleasure.

During the ceremony, all the Fathers and Brothers were to be grouped with the Europeans around the prince: as for me, I had chosen a little spot on high ground, from which I could have a comprehensive view of the whole, and make the sketches and notes which would help me to construct the large canvas ordered by Lo Bengula. Thus, no detail of the festival escaped me, and I can now give you an account "de visu".

At the time of the Little Dance, I described the theatre of the great festival, the plateau, the king's palace, the cattle kraal, the great open

space in front of this kraal. This open space is called in Matabele "Isibaia", or "Isibaia zimbozi", as one would say the "Agora" of Athens or the "Forum" of Rome. — During the rest of the year, the Isibaia enjoys an habitual calm which is entirely oriental, or rather tropical. This great plain is furrowed by the cattle, the goats and their herds who wander about with slow and lazy steps. All around this great plain are the huts of the natives, and behind them there is a wooden palisade, the "Umuzi wabuluwayo", the boulevard of Gubuluwayo, which forms the external circuit and which protects the flocks and the inhabitants from wild beasts, and, if necessary, from their enemies. Beyond this palisade the white men live.

For several days before the festival, and especially on the actual day, we saw numerous troops of Matabele warriors arriving at this public square, usually so quiet and peaceful. These were the regiments called by the king from all parts of the territory. Seeing them at a distance — their heads crowned with black ostrich plumes — one might almost take them for the Queen's Grenadiers, in tall busbys. But when close at hand, one is quickly undeceived: a leopard skin on their back, that is all their uniform; their arms, an ox-hide shield which they hold in the left hand, assegais and knobkerries which they hold in the right hand.

The festival lasts for four full days, during which the king must feed his people. In return he receives many gifts from his faithful subjects.

The FIRST day is the day of the Great Dance, strictly speaking. At about three o'clock in the afternoon, all the warriors are in their assigned positions. Lo Bengula appears at the entrance to his cattle kraal, in front of the vast open space; he makes me sit on his left hand, with my drawing paper, at the entrance to the Isibaia: then he climbs a small hill formed of the accumulated dung of all the cattle of Gubuluwayo. From there, he extends his right hand majestically towards the 8,000 warriors, standing in orderly ranks around the semicircle, in lines three to four deep. At this signal, the battalions give a great shout: "Yebo, yebo, yebezu". It is the royal salute: then, while remaining stationary, the soldiers raise and lower their feet in unison; in unison also, the warriors shake their shields as they raise and lower them; still in unison, they raise and lower their knobkerries which appear and disappear, in a most perfect ensemble, above the 8,000 busbys adorned with ostrich plumes. This is the military dance.

From time to time the exercises are interrupted, and then the bravest captains appear in the semicircle and imitate the proceedings and exploits of war; they love to display their strength, their skill and their flexibility at these manoeuvres. They are really terrible to see when they rush upon their enemy with a ferocious air and frightful cries. When one sees them, one gets an idea of the bloody battle fought between the English and the Kaffirs of Cetewayo.

When the chiefs have concluded their warlike dance, I see on my left, emerging in two long files from the neighbouring huts, the procession of queens, magnificently adorned with tinsel of all kinds, ribbons and shawls in vivid colours. In a high pitched tone they sing the royal salute: "Yebo, yebo, yebezu". With slow and rhythmic pace, they advance into the semicircle: in one hand they hold the conjugal cirlet, sign of fidelity, in the other, they bear a green branch, symbol of peace. They perform some

fairly quiet dances, and then retire whence they came. It is now almost six o'clock in the evening: the setting sun casts a golden and reddish light, making this strange and primitive scene almost poetic: one would think oneself transported to the time of the patriarchs in Arabia or on the plains of Chaldea. When the sun has set, everybody goes off to his tent or to his friends for the feast and to enjoy a well deserved rest.

The next day, the SECOND day of the festival, we see quite a different sight. At midday, when the sun, straight above our heads, pours down its burning rays, we see a crowd of Matabele warriors rush, like an impetuous torrent, towards the district where live the white people. The King approaches at their head, wearing a belt of gold which shines on his skin, and a green scarf across his shoulder: he alone may wear a belt of this colour. He walks along, leaning on his assegai. Suddenly he stops: the human flood at his heels gives a low growl. The chief throws his assegai and it whistles through the air to strike the ground some sixty metres away. A group of savages dashes forward, to see which of them will run the fastest. Soon, one of the warriors, proud of his exploit and of his victory, brings back the royal assegai to the great prince.

This military ceremony is symbolic. The king receives the assegai and says these words: "He who loves me obeys me in all things, as this faithful warrior has followed me from afar and has brought back my assegai." Deafening cries greet the winner and applaud the king's words. Finally, the whole savage crowd returns to the "Isibaia zimbozi" and everything is silent once more.

The THIRD day is the day of the immolation or sacrifice of the victims.

Standing near the cattle kraal, on the little hill of which I have already spoken, Lo Bengula gives the order to bring forward the victims destined for sacrifice. A little later we see two or three hundred horned cattle arrive in the midst of the open plain. In front come ten magnificent pure black bulls. The prince looks upon the great herd with satisfaction: then he extends his right hand towards the assembled beasts. This gesture signifies that everything living belongs to him. And the people reply with their patriotic cry: "Yebo, yebo, Yebezu! — Yes yes, to you who are so great!"

After that they sort the beasts and arrange in what order they will be sacrificed. The cattle are brought into the middle of the semicircle, where stands the induna who has been appointed the sacrificer. The induna advances slowly towards the first victim, held by four strong young men: reaching the animal, he quickly glides to the left side; then, with a rapid movement, he plunges his assegai into the body, between the ribs and the shoulder, and pushes it as far as the lung: the animal gives a dull bellow, and all is finished. With the blood pouring from its nostrils, it makes about two steps and falls. This operation is completed with a most astounding rapidity: the space of one hour suffices to sacrifice one hundred beasts. The bodies of the black or sacred bulls are dragged into the king's cattle kraal. Their flesh and their blood will be used as philtres and medicine, and probably also for the feasts of the witch-doctors, called "Amazizis". The other animals, divided up on the spot, are distributed to the people, who spend the night gorging themselves with meat and with tyawala. I

must confess that this sacrificial scene is not at all pleasant. It is as though one were in a great charnel-house or in a huge abattoir. One's senses of sight, smell and hearing, all receive a most disagreeable impression.

Finally, there dawns, with radiant sunshine, the FOURTH day of the Matabele festival. This day is consecrated to the ceremonies of the "First Fruits", and offers a more poetic spectacle than the massacres of the previous day, though still most realistic.

When the sun appears above the hills to the east, that is, at about nine o'clock in the morning, Lo Bengula goes to the middle of the Isibaia.

In the middle of the plain there is an immense pyre: this pyre contains the bones of all the animals killed during the past year for the needs of the king and of the people of Gubuluwayo. In front of the pyre is placed the royal seat, a primitive throne, consisting of a simple redwood chair: the king seats himself, then lights the fire; from time to time he rises and stirs the fire himself with his assegai; slave women are kept continually busy stoking and encouraging the flames.

Whilst the thick clouds of sacred smoke cover the plain and fill the lungs — not very delicate — of these sons of the tropics, the eight thousand warriors range themselves around the pyre, crouched on their haunches and completely still. Behind them crowd the rest of the people, women and children. Within this semicircle, close to the fire and about five paces from the front row of the soldiers, one sees the witch-doctors, the Amazisis, seated on the ground beside young slaves who examine carefully the new plants, separate the sheaves of maize, shake out the ears of amabele or Kaffircorn, etc., etc. These first fruits are offered to the king who gives them a triple libation.

At the same time, the queens, dressed, as on the previous day, in their richest ornaments, file in a procession before the assembled people: several times they file around the pyre, singing hymns to the spirits of Matchoban, father of Mosilikatsi, of Mosilikatsi, father of Lo Bengula, the prince of peace, the prince of war, the great king, the king of kings, "enkos amakos".

During these lengthy ceremonies, the Matabele women bring roasted meats, the smell of which is fragrant in the air, and modifies a little the acrid smell of the smoke which rises from the pyre.

Finally, when all these rites are concluded, the festival ends, as end the festivals of all primitive peoples, and indeed of other peoples too, with immense and fabulous feasts which leave the people with pleasant memories, and which strengthen their respect for an devotion to king Lo Bengula.

## 12. OTHER MISSIONARIES AND TRADERS

Gubuluwayo, the 28th February, 1880.

You in Belgium, who receive the post some six or even seven times per day, you would never believe the great interest which we, two thousand leagues from home, take in the arrival of the black postman who brings news from Europe fairly regularly once a fortnight. When the end of the

fortnight approaches, the post is the usual subject of all our conversations. At the least delay: — When will it arrive?... Is the Koumalo river in flood?... Have the black postmen had an accident? — (they are usually mounted on horseback or on oxen)... We start making guesses... Did the post-bearers from Shoshong reach Tati before the Tati postmen left that town?... In addition, Kaffir officers are not always exactly punctual... There is also the fear that they may have met a lion... It is fine to-day in the Matoppo Hills... the Koumalo must be low enough to cross. — Oh yes!... the post will arrive in time. — Every white person you meet talks of the same subject... One can think of nothing else...

Now in the distance, we see all at once, in the bush which covers the hill northwards, the white caps of the black riders. Then we see Mr. Helm, the Gubuluwayo postmaster, going to meet them... Yes... It is he!... Everyone rushes to our house where Mr. Helm dismounts. — He distributes the letters. — What news of Europe, of England, of Belgium, of the Transvaal, of the Cape? — Nobody listens... The happy people who have received letters go off into a quiet corner: they cannot read fast enough these dear letters from parents and relatives, friends and colleagues. Everyone is quiet.

After a few minutes, the silence is broken. — Well? What news? Thank God, all is well. — Everyone tells everyone else of his happiness. — Then they open the newspapers and hastily read the headlines, leaving until more at leisure the pleasure of reading them in detail.

The English residents here, Messrs. Fairbairn, Martin, Grant, Greite, Tainton, have all been extremely kind to us and have given us a thousand tokens of their friendship. We in turn have tried to show them how very grateful we are. With the Protestant ministers, too, despite the difference of our religious beliefs, we have the most cordial relationships. Meeting as we do, in close intimacy, many prejudices vanish, many misapprehensions disappear. Recently, all the Protestant Missionaries, five in number, met at our house. I shall describe the occasion.

Some days ago, from the 19th to the 26th of February, Mr. Greite, whose house we are taking over, and of which we already occupy a part, sold by auction all the goods which he will not take with him to the Transvaal. Every white person in the district, including the Protestant ministers, came to make purchases at this sale and to say good-bye to the Greite family.

These gentlemen, therefore, spent an entire week in Gubuluwayo: we saw a good deal of them and met all the ministers who are in this country. Mr. Thomas, the most celebrated of them brought here by Messrs. Moffat and Mackenzie, has lived here for twenty years. Like those two ministers, who have described their journeyings among the natives, Mr. Thomas has also written a book full of the most interesting details. Mr. Thomas, having lived for so long in this country, has a great influence on Lo Bengula. He has asked the king for permission to take me to his house at Shilo, about three leagues from Gubuluwayo. His three sons have died in Africa, and I have promised to carve their names and commemorative inscriptions on the fine stone monument which, their father has placed on their grave. Mr. Thomas has already shown us much kindness by giving us some wheat.

Messrs. Sykes and Elliott are at the mission of Inyati. Mr. Sykes has lived for a long time among the Matabele: at first he was not too pleased to see us. With Mr. Elliott, however, I have made some joint scientific studies; he has now introduced me to Mr. Sykes, and I hope that these good relations will continue. Mr. Helm is settled at Hope Fountain, about a league from Gubuluwayo; he often comes to visit us: he has done much for us and we are under a great obligation to him. He was living at Hope Fountain with another missionary, called Mr. Cockin, of whose death we have just heard. Mr. Cockin left Gubuluwayo a month ago to attend a Protestant synod at Clerksdorp in the Transvaal; but, on his way, at Shoshong, he died from the effects of an attack of dysentery and malaria. He too had been a little opposed to us when we first arrived: but had already become more friendly on getting to know us better. I had given him two water-colours of his house at Hope Fountain which he wished to send to his family in England. May God have mercy on his soul!

Thanks to the presence of all these gentlemen, of all the other white people, of ourselves and of some of the indunas, Mr. Greite's sale was most successful. Lo Bengula himself came to the sale and bought an old horse for which he paid two hundred pound sterling or five thousand francs, in elephants tusks... Quite a fine price! The other prices were in keeping. We bought some things which we badly needed: among others his counter and the wooden shelves ranged along the wall, the whole lot for four pounds: these will be useful for our library and for our scientific collections, etc.

Talking of science, we have been so busy since our arrival in the capital, studying the language, visiting the king, the chief, the white people, repairing the king's chariots, looking after the sick, moving our waggons into Mr. Greite's property, etc., etc., that we have not been able to occupy ourselves, as we would have wished, with scientific studies. In the future, we hope to do better with regard to this. We shall have more leisure and more opportunity when we are settled in Mr. Greite's house, which he handed over to us to-day.

To-day he has left us: he has taken with him several waggons full of merchandise which, sold in the Cape Colony, will realise a fortune. You may judge by a few details. He loaded in the waggons ten thousand pounds of ivory, the rich spoil of many elephants, killed in the hunt: the weight of the tusks varies, according to age, from sixty to eighty and even one hundred pounds. Mr. Greite is also taking four hundred pounds of ostrich feathers, the brilliant plumage of hundreds of these birds.

Three months ago, a load of six thousand pounds of ivory left Gubuluwayo; during our own northward journey, from the Transvaal to Shoshong, we met several waggons carrying between them almost twenty thousand pounds of elephants ivory. If hunting goes on at this rate, soon there will remain not one elephant in this part of the country. The hunters will then have to press further north, beyond the Zambesi and up into the heart of Africa.

We, however, should be grateful: it is the elephant hunters, Boer and English, searching for ivory, who have opened up southern Africa: they became in this way the first pioneers of civilisation, in the colonies of Natal, of the Orange River Colony, of the Transvaal, of Damara, etc., etc. How strange it is! The old paths, trodden by wild elephants through

the forest, have become, little by little, first the road of the hunter, then of the ox-wagon, then of the coach, and finally of the railway.

I must now describe to you the house, which from to-morrow, will become a Catholic Mission and a residence for our Jesuits. We have given it the name of the Residence of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is indeed the Sacred Heart of Jesus which has brought us here, protected us and settled us in this barbaric country: it is also the Sacred Heart of Jesus which will, we hope, continue to bless us and maintain our work, this work which is his and his alone. As soon as possible, we shall consecrate a little church to this Divine Heart, a church will be the home and palladium of our Mission. Meanwhile, Mr. Greite's iron store will serve us as a chapel; it occupies a good position close to the entrance of our enclosure.

Our property in Gubuluwayo, about a hectare in extent, is most excellently situated; it consists of an entrance-court, a grassy meadow, a kitchen-garden, poultry-yard, sheep-fold, stable, cattle kraal, native compound, kitchen, house, and also the store which we wish to transform into a chapel.

In our farmyard, we already have 38 sheep and 12 goats; two calves gambol about the kraal around two milch cows and our oxen. To-day, we have just bought two young bullocks, each for 4 cotton coverlets, costing 16 francs in Belgium; some thirty hens comprise our poultry-yard. These hens were bought at six for an ell of coarse cotton cloth, or ten centimes apiece: a considerable difference to the cost of hens in Brussels. The sheep also are not expensive: a sheep which would be worth 50 francs in Hasselt, is here sold in exchange for a blanket worth four francs. Our sheep are taller than those of Belgium: they have scarcely any fleece, but thin hair like a goat, and a magnificent tail: some of these tails can weigh up to twenty pounds, and the Boers of the Transvaal are sometimes obliged to make a little cart to hold up this marvellous appendage which the sheep then drags around like a little wheelbarrow. The tail is the most succulent part of the animal, and its fat is used in many ways, replacing oil, butter and lard. Maize is equally cheap, but wheat is excessively dear: we had to pay 60 francs for 139 pounds!

We have maize very frequently in our daily diet. This is how it is cooked. They boil the whole ears of corn in water for five or six hours: this simple dish makes a good substitute for potatoes. Another method of cooking it is to fry the separated grains in butter or in fat; the grains swell up and burst; after about ten minutes, one removes them, sprinkles them with sugar, and one has quite a delicious dessert. — For drink we have coffee, made with water and with the milk of the preceding day; if one adds to the latter, slightly sour, a little sugar, one has a drink which is most refreshing during the excessive heat. Every morning Kaffir women arrive in the town bearing on their heads freshly gathered ears of maize, carefully arranged on stalks of sugar-cane; small piccanins follow them bearing on their heads excellent pumpkins and "makomanas" or water-melons. In exchange we give them pieces of cotton cloth.

As you see, our life is almost pastoral: were it not for the climate, the colour and clothing of the people, one might almost imagine oneself to be in the country districts of Limbourg.

### 13. THE MISSION AND THE MATABELE

Gubuluwayo, the 14th March, 1880.

Barom. 677; therm, cent. 19 degrees to 30 degrees; rain 3 cent. 05. — Rain since 1st January, second half of rainy season: 7 degrees. 421.

Our relations with the black people continue to be good; the king and the people seem to be well disposed towards us. But as long as we are not fully conversant with "isindebele", the language of the Matabele, our work for them must necessarily be hindered and restricted. We have been working with great enthusiasm on the difficult idioms of the Kaffirs, whose language is so different from our IndoEuropean tongues.

So that you may learn more about this strange people, their religion, their government, their habits, their qualities, their defects, their customs, their daily life, I shall tell you about certain events which have happened in our presence, and of which we have been witnesses. I shall, therefore, be speaking from real knowledge, and I hope that my narrative will be interesting.

Here is an incident which goes back to the days of the Great Dance, which I described in my letter of the 12th February. When all the Matabele warriors were present in Gubuluwayo, a number of sick people came to ask the help of my art, or rather of my charity. Among them was a tall and very fine old man; his name was Mafoua and he was suffering cruelly from an persistent ophthalmia. I gave him a salve, an anti-phlogistic liquid, long used by my family. A few hours later, the inflammation was relieved: an abundant flow of tears had eased the old man.

Mafoua is the induna of a village situated three days' march from the capital. In payment for my services, the good man offered me a magnificent ostrich feather. I refused it, telling him that we expect no reward from men, and that the "King on high, the Enkosi pesoul" would reward us for the little glass of water which we were happy to give to one of our brother men. The old man seemed very moved by these words and said to me: "Master, come to my people! You will be well received. I have maize, rice and all the fruits which can make a man happy; we shall give you goats with fine horns and sheep with heavy tails. Come: you will give us much pleasure." I thanked him politely for this gracious invitation; I added that later on, perhaps, I would go to visit him, but that for the moment it was impossible, and I dismissed Mafoua with a few encouraging words.

Two days later, during the Great Dance, while going through the ranks of the army, I noticed Mafoua, like an old lion, following me everywhere with his eyes; each time that I caught sight of his white mane, above the black busbys of the other warriors, he saluted me with head and hand; above the shoulders of the Matabele soldiers.

Towards evening, after the review, he came to me again; he looked upon me with an air of affection; this time he had brought his daughter. In presenting her to me, he said: "Master, this is my only daughter; she is called Bigiwe; she has been ill for two years. Cure her, as you have cured me; cure her for the love of the "Enkosi pesoul", the King on high."

I replied that, if it depended on me, I would willingly cure his daughter for the love of the Enkosi pesoul; but, I added, "we must submit

ourselves to the will of God: he alone can render efficacious the remedies of the white man." After that, the old induna came to see me every day with his daughter. After returning to his village, Mafoua several times sent his daughter, Bigiwe, to see me, in company with his second induna, through whom he expressed his gratitude.

Inflammations of the eyes are very common among the natives, the chief cause being probably the thick smoke of the fires which they light inside their huts. These kaffir huts have no opening for air except their low doors; so the smoke can only escape after completely filling the interior of the dwelling.

I have already told you that the Kaffirs are very prone to theft. Here is a story which supports this statement. You remember Mr. Martin, the kind Englishman, a native of Jersey, who was so kind to me after our arrival and who looked after me in his own house. Two weeks ago, this gentleman asked me join him on a fishing excursion. We took with us our fishing-lines and a spade to dig worms; we mounted some frisky ponies and set off across the hills and the valleys, the marshes and the woods. After some two hours of riding like a Steeple-chase, we reached a hill overlooking the valley of the Umzingwane and began a somewhat perilous descent. Our mounts accomplished it with great skill and we arrived, safe and sound, on the bank of a lovely river, as wide as the Lesse at Dinant and deep as the Escaut at Antwerp. We cast in our lines: to my great astonishment I landed a huge crab! Later on, there appeared a striped eel: the sight of it terrified and put to flight the natives of the district who had come down from the hills to watch us fish; they took it for a viper, an "inioka". Shortly afterwards, the natives approached the spot where we had left our ponies, our tackle, our coats and hats. Mr. Martin heard the ponies whinney, and hurried over just in time to save our mounts and our belongings. A black came over to me with a wheedling air. Mr. Martin was most distrustful of him and said to me: "Watch out for your hat!" After two hours of fishing, we collected our things together: I took hold of my horse's mane to mount into the saddle and for a moment I lost sight of the crafty Kaffir. In this short instant, he whipped my hat off my head and dashed off through the reeds on the river bank. I shouted out. Mr. Martin leaped on his horse and went in pursuit. I tried to do the same, but my pony, excited by the swift departure of his companion, wouldn't let me mount. Five minutes later, from the top of a rock, Mr. Martin called back to me: "Come on... we're too late!" My hat was lost. But what vexed us more than anything, was the simulated indignation of the other blacks, who, whilst denouncing the thief, would themselves no doubt have robbed us of all we possessed, had they not had a most wholesome respect for our sjamboks of rhinoceros hide and for the well-shod hooves of our mounts. So that is what my fishing excursion in the heart of Africa cost me: a hat!

Another, and more serious adventure, might have had grave consequences. About ten days ago, one of our Zulu servants, about to finish his term of service, came to me and said:

"Master, it is the 10th day of the second moon: I came to work for you on the 10th day of the 12th moon. Give me the blanket which you promised me, and I shall leave content."

"October," replied I — October is his name, — "you came to us when the moon was at its 17th night: I have written this in my big book. However, you have permission to leave on the 13th day."

On the 13th day, October came to me and said: "Master, the cattle are in the kraal; I have cut wood for the fire, and brought water from the fountain. Now give me the two blankets which the other baas promised me." He claimed that Father Law had promised him a blanket for each month. I could see that he would leave us on ill terms, and I suspected that he had the intention of robbing us. He refused to take his blanket and went off in great anger.

Towards evening, Father Depelchin and I were talking quietly in the shed, and trying to see in the sky the comet which was due to appear on the 6th February. One of the cow herds came running towards us, looking a bit embarrassed. We questioned him. "October has gone", said he, "taking with him the black cow and her brown calf. He left at the hour when the sun was on the Mount of Serpents, Entab Enioka, and he was driving the beasts southwards towards his village."

We ran to our waggons: one of Father Depelchin's coats had disappeared, as well as a waterproof, some blankets, etc. But we could not let matters rest there: if we allowed this theft to go unpunished, we, and all the whites, would be at the mercy of the blacks.

Next day, at dawn, we mounted, good Mr. Martin and I, and left for Amatje Amhlope, the "White Rocks", where Lo Bengula was staying at the time.

After an hour and half of galloping, by hills and valleys, by rocks, marshes and rivers, we reached the White Rocks and tied up our mounts to the fence of the rustic palace of the "king of kings". In accordance with the etiquette of this country, we passed several groups of Kaffirs crouching around the royal hut, without saluting them. Then, getting down on our hands and knees at the low opening to the hut we called the king: "Koumallo! Koumallo! Lord! Lord! And the king replied: "Sakou bona! Good-day! Come in!" Thereupon, we crawled into the hut, dark as a dead fire, and we sat on the ground inside without further ceremony.

Because of the sudden transition from dazzling sunlight to deep obscurity, for nearly five minutes we could see nothing at all. Little by little we began to distinguish the objects around us.

Lo Bengula was nonchalantly seated on the ground, near the opening, on an English plaid: his left elbow leaned on a bolster, in his right hand he held an enormous piece of roast meat which he was devouring with obvious appreciation. To the left of the entrance, I saw queen Kwalila; her royal spouse had given her a hunk of beef which she was busy eating.

We took our places in the middle of the hut, close to the pole which supported the roof. I was seated opposite the queen, and Mr. Martin opposite the king. Lo Bengula spoke to a slave, called Diamond, standing a little distance away. The servant went out, soon returning with a welcoming dish. It was a European plate, well filled with grilled meat, sprinkled with salt and accompanied by a knife. We hastened to thank the king, politely saying: Koumallo! The king replied by a simple gesture of the head, and we attacked our dish of food. Before eating, I made a large sign of the cross: the king looked at me in great astonishment. I told him that it was

a religious custom, similar to their purification ceremonies. He seemed satisfied by this reply.

We found the royal cooking exceedingly good: the Kaffirs are specially skillful in preparing meat. They put pieces of mutton and beef in a great earthen pot. On the lid of the pot they keep a big fire of embers: meat cooked in this way in its own juice, gives a most savoury roast, good enough to flatter the palates of the greatest gourmards in Belgium. It needs no further seasoning.

After the meal, the king passed us his packet of Transvaal tobacco and his box of Swedish matches. When the aroma of our pipes had replaced the smell of the roast beef, Mr. Martin began to speak and explained to the king, in the Betchouana tongue, the object of our visit.

Lo Bengula listened attentively to our complaint: from time to time he interrupted Mr. Martin with an "ehehe, ehehe!" He was obviously very annoyed by the theft of which we had been the victims; three times he promised us that he would look into the matter on our behalf, and would pursue the great crime committed against the foreign "abafundisi".

After that, I asked His Majesty if he was satisfied with the three waggons which we had repaired. The king smiled graciously and assured us that we wrought three marvels.

Then I invited him to dine with us as soon as we would have settled into our house in Gubuluwayo. "That is good," said he, "I accept. But shall I have champagne?" I told him that we hadn't any champagne, but that Father Terorde, who would be returning from Kimberley in May, would bring some for the great prince. — "Ah! that is good," said the king, "I shall come and taste it."

After that he began to talk about the Boers. "Ah! these Boers!" said he, "these Boers are men who tell lies. One of them asked me for a span of oxen to go down to the Cape Colony. He promised to send them back, but he has kept my eighteen bullocks. Another promised me one hundred bottles of champagne in payment for ten elephant tusks, but he kept my ivory and I have never heard from him again. Another Boer borrowed a horse to hunt my elephants and then went and sold it in Zeerust. Yesterday, a Boer told me that all the white people lie just like the blacks. Do the new "Abafundisi" also lie?" — and he smiled maliciously at me.

"Sire", I replied, "we have not come here from so very far away to tell you lies, but to teach you the truth! We have come here solely to do good to you and to your people, to cure the sick and to teach to all the good way to live one's life."

The king approved of my words, and said: "Yes, I believe you, the Abafundisi are not like the Boers."

We then thanked the king for his kind interest in the white people, as well as for his generous reception of us and for the delicious meat which he had given to us to appease our hunger. He then shook our hands and bade us good-bye.

As soon as we left, Lo Bengula called in two witch-doctors, William and Africa, whom he had obliged to wait, on their knees by the door of his hut, for the two long hours of our interview, despite their reiterated calls of: "Koumalo, Amadoda, Engulabe, Enkos, Amakos," etc., etc. These men, who play a high part in the carrying out of the king's decisions, are also

the king's chief medical doctors. One of them, William, is my patient or client, call him which you will. He comes to me apparently to ask me for medicine, under the pretext of illness, in order to be able, in his turn, to distribute my medicines to his Kaffir patients. Frequently now, however, I make him swallow his medicine on the spot. It is his own fault for lying and making a pretence of illness.

We returned to Gubuluwayo the same day; but we do not quite know whether justice will be done to us: for, in this strange country, both justice and the police are organised in a most peculiar manner. We hear that the British government is about to send out a special commissioner to enquire into the deaths of Mr. Paterson and Mr. Thomas, junior, who died about two years ago, on the borders of the kingdom in an accident whose causes have not yet been made clear.

#### 14. JUSTICE AND RELIGION UNDER LOBENGULA

Gubuluwayo, 28th March, 1880.

I have already spoken to you about witchcraft, which plays a great part in the administration of justice: here are a few remarks on this subject.

One Sunday I was walking among the hills near Gubuluwayo while reciting my breviary: my dog was at my heels. Suddenly, he stopped short and began to smell the air. I raised my head and saw a number of vultures hovering above a near-by tree. I made my way through the thick bush, and soon a horrible sight presented itself before my eyes. A corpse was suspended from the branches of the tree: half eaten away by the vultures, it had a most disgusting smell.

It was most probably the corpse of the wife of one of the eight indunas condemned to death, two weeks previously, for having bewitched the king's pigs. Husbands, wives and children were massacred for the one crime. That is the law of this country!

In Africa to-day, as in Europe in former ages, sorcery is a crime of which one can very easily accuse a person whose death one desires. Once the crime of sorcery is asserted, it is quickly proved and the guilty man with his wives and children undergo a pitiless execution. But blood calls for more blood. The victims are avenged by their relatives, by sons or brothers who have managed to escape the massacre.

Another case of this nature has just occurred, which touches us quite closely. You remember the princess Njina whom we met when we first arrived in this town. She was friend to the white people, and also their protector. Well, she has been obliged to leave Gubuluwayo and retreat into the hills. Njina, for long all-powerful with the king, reigned with her brother. But since the king's marriage to Kwalila, daughter of Umzila — who has become titular queen, and whose child should be the heir presumptive, — princess Njina has seen her credit rapidly decline: she is "de trop" at court. She is now accused, with the help of the Amazizi witch-doctors, of casting a spell on the king's house to prevent the birth of male heirs. All

Lo Bengula's brothers were summoned to the White Rocks, the usual residence of the king. A family council was called to discuss this case of high treason. Njina has denied the deed, and has offered to present herself for the judgment of the oracle of the god of the cavern, the god Makalaka, of whom I shall tell more presently. What will be the reply of the god? No one knows. In any case, Makalaka will find himself in an awkward situation. If he declares Njina guilty, the wretched woman will be killed and a powerful partisan will be annoyed: if he declares her innocent, he will annoy another powerful person who seems at the moment to be in favour. The god Makalaka will need all his arts to extricate himself from this difficulty.

What can we do, we poor missionaries, in the midst of such abominations of savagery, to open the eyes of these unhappy people, to teach them to tame the brutal passions which enslave them and to persuade them that Jesus Christ alone can make them happy both on earth and in eternity?

Yes, one must come to a country like this to see the abyss which separates these people from Christian society. Here, crime counts not at all, the punishment is everything. Human consciousness appears to be stifled: the most sacred laws of nature are outraged. Filial piety scarcely exists; conjugal fidelity is inspired only by force and by terror; slavery extends its yoke over these unfortunates; a permanent state of war is the great provider of slaves. The condition of the women is most wretched: they are mere slaves, mere "chattels". Condemned to the hardest work, they receive no consideration at all, no respect. The king's wives work in the fields, bring in the crops and make the beer, etc., etc. When the king travels, they follow, intermingled with the slaves and the cattle, the king's chariot, bearing on their heads calabashes of beer to quench, at each stop, the thirst of the "king of kings". The king punishes by death any attempt at flight, or the slightest suspicion of resistance. Yes, Christianity alone can raise the moral and social level of the wife and mother.

And then the superstitions and gross trickery by which live the witch-doctors or Amazizis. All the natives seem to believe in the occult powers, somewhat vaguely defined, of certain mysterious beings, in the witch-doctors, called Abatagati (sg. Umtagati), of the rain makers, Tchabatchaba, in the diviners who smell out those who have cast spells, in magic, in magic herbs, in philtres, etc., etc. Humanity is everywhere the same, and, where Christianity does not exist, the same aberrations exist in all parts of the world. It would be a most interesting study to make a research into the analogies which exist between the superstitions of our Matabele and those of the ancient pagan people of Italy, of Greece, of Syria and of Egypt.

However, in the midst of so many misconceptions, our Kaffirs seem to have a vague conception of a superior god, a supreme being whom in their language they call the "King on high", the "Enkosi pesoul". But this conception is decidedly vacillating: they give to this king all sorts of qualities which are incompatible with the idea of divinity. They address no prayer to him, nor do they offer him homage. He is a sort of idol, similar to the one whom other African peoples adorn with the name of Morimo, Molemo, Mejino, etc., etc. Externally, their cult is confined to the rites performed once a year, as I have described them in writing about the Great Dance, the festival of the First Fruits.

As in ancient paganisms, oracles play a big part in the religion and life of the Matabele. I have recently learned that there exists, some eleven miles from Gubuluwayo, a famous oracle, that of the god Makalaka. This god lives in a subterranean cave, in the midst of a labyrinth of rocks.

Nobody has ever seen this god; but he has sons and daughters who are priests and priestesses, and who live in the neighborhood of his cave. A curious detail: quite recently, three of the god's sons were put to death as ordinary mortals for having stolen some of the king's wheat. Most likely, Lo Bengula said to himself that the sons of a god should behave better than ordinary men, and that, if they betrayed that trust, they were more criminal and more guilty: *corruptio optimi pessima*. And that is why he decided to make an example of them.

In this cave, there is, they say, a well which is very deep and very black: the well of the abyss. From time to time, dull sounds like thunder issue from this well. The faithful, trembling with fear, place on the edge of the abyss meat and corn, poultry, cakes and other gifts, to appease the hunger of the terrible god and to make him propitious. After making their offering, the poor suppliants announce in a loud voice the object of their wishes, and the aim of their coming. They seek information about hidden things, future happenings, the names of people who have bewitched them, the results of their undertakings. After a few minutes of deep silence, they hear, in the midst of the subterranean noises, strange and uncomprehensible words, which the witch-doctors, the Amazisis, colleagues of the makers of thunder, explain to the credulous devotees.

The replies, are often unfavourable... and the explanations often cost the poor supplicants their lives. Such is the oracle of the Matabele, the oracle which the princess Njina is to consult. Poor Njina!...

This, therefore, is the pristine happiness of these savages so much praised by certain people in Europe! This is the felicity of these children of nature so vaunted by dreamy philosophers! This is the people whom we attempt to convert — these their beliefs, their ideas, their traditions, their habits, their customs! Oh! how difficult this work will be, how ungrateful, how impossible to human powers, but possible only to God! It is obvious that we shall meet with terrible opposition, with a rising up of primeval passions, stirred up by the Spirits of Evil, when we commence our work.

Meanwhile, whilst awaiting the opportunity to open schools and to teach religion to these savages, we try to render to them such services as are within our power. As I have already said, I am extremely busy looking after their sick people. That, together with the study of the language, is my chief occupation. In addition to the moral wretchedness of the Matabele, there are also their physical ills, their infirmities, their sores, their fevers, their epidemics — the inevitable results of poverty, of ignorance, of hunger and thirst, of uncleanness, of the stale air in their filthy huts. Picture to yourself that these wretches know no medicines other than absurd philtres, no other dressing for their sores than ... cow dung!

On the 21st March, Palm Sunday, king Lo Bengula called me to his residence at the White Rocks, Amatje Amhlope. Last Monday, I mounted my sorry hack, called Lightning, and, in less than two hours reached the king's kraal.

I found His Majesty, lying on a woollen blanket, a prey to the excruciating pains of rheumatism. He received me as though I were his best friend. I consoled him; I prescribed massage and began by demonstrating this operation myself. It was indeed sad to see the "king of kings", the great chief, the terrible boar, not of the Ardennes but of the Matoppo Hills, suffering so cruelly and allowing himself to be treated by a European Umfundisi. From this you will see that we possess the entire confidence of the king, who calls upon us for all sorts of things: let us hope that his confidence will be justified and that we shall thus be able to make returns for all his kindness to us since we have been in his kingdom.

While I was taking care of the royal patient, a timid voice was heard outside the hut. The king replied: "Wait, I am busy: the Umfundisi is here." Half an hour later the same voice was again audible at the opening of the royal hut. I raised my eyes, and to my great surprise, I caught sight of the chief witch-doctor, or Amazizi. He must have been astounded that the king, his master, was thus discarding his drugs and spells, and having recourse instead to the arts of the European Abafundisi. I am hoping that His Majesty will have completely recovered in a few days.

Following the example of the "king of kings", the Enkos Amakos, the Amakosigazi or queens, the indunas, the Amatjokas or soldiers of the king, the other warriors, their wives and children, are crowding to us for medical attention. Hundreds of patients come to us for a cure for their sicknesses. The English traders also ask us for advice. Ah! if only we had a more comprehensive medical training, what a great service we could do! And the cure of the body would undoubtable help us, little by little, towards the conversion of souls.

It would indeed be wonderful if we had sufficient funds to be able to build a hospital, staffed by the good Sisters of Charity, who, more than the missionaries themselves, are able to work miracles of conversion among the pagan peoples of the world. Here, as in many other places, charity would overcome error and vice. Let us pray that this day may not be long in coming.

## 15. THE KING MOVES TO UMGANIN

Gubuluwayo, the 14th April, 1880.

In my letter of the 28th March, I told you about the sad position of princess Njina, sister to Lo Bengula, accused of the crimes of witchcraft and of conspiracy against the State. My fears have, alas! been only too soon realised. For many days the news which has been flying around the countryside has been the death sentence of the princess Njina.

It is difficult to discover, even in Gubuluwayo, the true causes of this tragic event. I set down what I have heard, confining myself to the role of narrator of the different stories which are circulating in the town.

Njina was a woman of much power, head of a large faction of the people: it is said that she had considerable influence on the government. After Lo Bengula's marriage to the daughter of king Umzila, Njina soon perceived that her authority and her credit were waning. They say that she

wished to govern, at any price. In preparation for the carrying out of her desires, she urged Lo Bengula to murder his brothers, of whom there are many, under the stupid pretext that they were seeking his death. In this way, with the king's brothers removed from the scene, Njina could intrigue to get rid of the king himself and of his children, in order to mount the throne of her father, Mosilikatsi, herself.

It is said that king Lo Bengula was keeping a watchful eye on the web which was being woven around him. Several chiefs then accused Njina of evil witchcraft, the object of which was to prevent Lo Bengula from having heirs. Such a crime would bring the death penalty. The princess, however, wished to prove herself innocent. She decided to appeal to the decision of the god Makalaka, who lives in the underground cave in the Matoppo Hills. Njina, therefore, set off in an ox-waggon to consult the oracle. On the way, however, she encountered so many obstacles, doubtless placed in her way by express design, that she was obliged to turn in her tracks and return to her own village. A few days later, by order of the king, this daughter of Mosilikatsi was hanged from a tree in the forest. Her unfortunate remains were devoured by jackals and vultures.

The 2nd April was the date of this last torture of the unfortunate Njina, and since that date, there have been numerous executions. The internal political situation of the kingdom of the Matabele, never particularly brilliant since the death of Mosilikatsi, because of the difficulties connected with Lo Bengula's ascent to the throne, does not seem to improve at all. After the tragic death of princess Njina, one of Mosilikatsi's surviving wives and a large number of indunas have been executed. Lo Bengula continues to rid himself, one by one, of the indunas appointed by his father, and to replace them by young men, who will owe everything to himself and who will, therefore, be devoted to his cause. The absolute power of the king replaces all the more usual machinery of government. In this country, there are no judges, no police, no game-keepers, no commissioners, no tax collectors, no such thing as a civil servant. Everything stems from the king, ends in the king and turns around the king. The king is the owner of all the cattle, all the horses, all the hunting rights, all the land. The king is everything, and the whole nation is obliged to carry out his wishes.

Besides, it is not only opposition to the government which is severely punished, and political criminals are not the only ones condemned to death: any crimes against the customs of the people, become, immediately they are discovered, the object of a spectacular repression, especially when women are the guilty ones. Any young girl, found wandering after sunset outside the village fence, is instantly condemned to the torture of flagellation and is cruelly whipped. A few days ago, two culprits who were caught in this way, were pitilessly bound with reeds and thrown to drown in the river of Gubuluwayo, only a short distance from our house. These terrible examples of the justice of the king make a profound impression on the minds of the people, and help to keep the public morality up to a certain level, though, truth to tell, that level is not exactly high. All the people tremble beneath the terrible hand of the king, the enkos amakos.

Gubuluwayo, the 29th April, 1880.

We continue, thank God, in the good graces of king Lo Bengula. It must however be acknowledged that the Protestant ministers, who have been in this country for twenty-five years, enjoy a greater credit and a more stable position than ourselves.

Since our arrival, Sir Bartle Frere has written us several letters which we have translated to the king. In these letters, the High Commissioner does not disguise the interest which he has in our work, and states that we are under the special protection of the Crown, adding that we must refer any difficulties which may arise to the Governor-General. This distinguished patronage, together with the services which we have rendered to the king and to his people, have brought us the favour of Lo Bengula.

The king has recently left the White Rocks, Amatje Amhlope, to move to the neighborhood of the Umganin. Perhaps the pasturage did not suffice for the royal herds; perhaps the reasons are political. In any case, it is the custom of the Matabele kings to change their place of residence with frequency; and nothing could be more easy. A few hours suffice to build the thatched huts of pole and dagga which serve as homes for the king, the queens, the chiefs, the slaves and the flocks and herds.

Umganin is situated about twenty four miles from Gubuluwayo. To go there and back, in one day, through woods, hills and rivers, is not so easy a task as one would suppose, and one needs to be an experienced horseman to undertake the journey without too much fatigue. I am indeed grateful to my dear parents who, long ago, arranged that I should be taught to ride. Believe me, to know how to ride, swim and shoot, to enjoy robust health, to know a little about botany, mineralogy, medicine, even cooking, and the other trades so indispensable in life, — all these sciences, all these practical experiences are even more necessary in the deserts of Africa than Latin and Greek, literature and philosophy. Add to these some of the solid virtues, the spirit of prayer, of humility, of self-abnegation and of mortification, and you will have the perfect missionary. It must be remembered that we are striving, not with ideologues, but with wild beasts, with the desert, with African tribesmen more savage than the soil which sees their birth.

Ten days ago, on the 19th April, I rode out to Umganin with Mr. Martin and a Mr. Van Roye, a Boer who has come here on business. Early in the morning, in a thick, cold fog, for already winter is approaching, we were all on the road to Hope Fountain, where we were to meet Mr. Helm who was coming with us to Umganin. We were very warmly welcomed at Hope Fountain: the mistress of the house offered us a cup of tea and an English breakfast. At 10 o'clock, we set off on the road to Umganin at a gallop, reaching Umganin about midday.

On our way to the royal hut, we saw the prince by the entrance to the sheep kraal. A slave was shaving his Majesty. Lo Bengula continued this important occupation, waved his hand to us and asked us to wait. We waited in attendance near the stable. Soon the chief approached us, followed by his people who saluted him with the most pompous titles. Lo Bengula reached the royal tent, shook us by the hand and invited us to follow him

into his rustic palace. The king, noticing the satchel which hung from my shoulder, pointed to it and asked me what I had inside.

"Sire", replied I, "some meat and bread." "But," said Lo Bengula, "in my royal residence, is there not some meat?" "I have something else too, sire," I added, "a small bottle of medicine which one mixes with water." "Ah! ah!" said he, smiling, "show me this Umniti" I passed him the flask of cognac which had been half emptied en route by the white riders "Oh! oh!" cried he, "what do I see? Blandy! Blandy!"... The Kaffirs cannot pronounce the letter r. He carried the flask to his mouth, and after having tasted the brandy: "Umnandi umnandi, it is delicious," said he, and asked us to taste with him the royal nectar. Then he ordered one of his slaves, called Velagoubi, to take the bottle into the tent. We chatted after that and teased Mr. Martin, for whose particular benefit the flask had been brought. I profited by the good humour of the moment to explain to the prince the object of my visit.

Mr. Greite's cession to us of his house in Gubuluwayo had never been clearly explained to the king, and our friends warned us that it would be wise to have this sale ratified by the chief of the Matabele. I therefore explained the matter to Lo Bengula as best I could and obtained what I asked. The king has given me the right to stay on definitely in our house in Gubuluwayo, and to take care of the sick people from the court, the town and the surrounding country. He has further authorised me to occupy indefinitely the property ceded to us by Mr. Greite, and to construct buildings upon it. He has also confirmed his permission to the Fathers to cross his State, so that some may go as far as the Zambesi, among the Marotses-Mambunda, others eastwards among the Abagasa of Umzila.

After all that, I did not dare to ask for permission to build a chapel, but deemed it more prudent to await a later opportunity.

After this, the other gentlemen took their turn and presented their requests. Then we all, crawling after His Majesty, went into his hut. We sat in a circle; the king occupied the place nearest to the entrance, on the left; then came the queens, by order of superiority, then myself and the other gentlemen, round in the circle, as far as the right side of the opening. We then had to pass from hand to hand the calabash of kaffir beer... To drink from this pitcher is an honour which one must not decline, however one's stomach may rebel. When the turn of the third round of the calabash arrived, the king himself poured into it, very slowly and with much ceremony, the remains of the flask of brandy which I had presented to him. After that, I was so clumsy as to upset the cup of honour. You can guess my distress and the amazement of all present. But the king was kind enough to notice my embarrassment and teased me gaily for not yet knowing very much about the etiquette of the Matabele Court. — After that, the session concluded and we took our leave of Lo Bengula who saluted us most cordially.

It was growing late. We were anxious to get back to Gubuluwayo. We mounted our horses and in a very few minutes Umganin was already far behind us.

On our way, we passed through the kraal of the doctors or Amazisis. This village contains a small population of Hottentot adventurers, who have come up from the Cape Colony, claiming to be doctors. These famous

doctors send the sick people in their own families to me and content themselves with carrying out their operations on the other blacks.

Mr. Helm and I went into the hut of one of the principal inhabitants of the village, a certain Umluka, who came from the Cape. Umluka appears to know a little about Christianity, and it is possible that he was even baptised at some time in the Cape by a Protestant minister. He often comes to see me and I profit by his visits in learning a little Matabele from him. When he is translating the New Testament into that language, he assures me that soon he and all his family will become Catholics. May God so will it!... I do not, however, count on it much, because I am beginning to learn the exact worth of the word and of the promises of the people of this country.

Umluka went outside for a moment to buy some maize; his wife entertained us courteously: she spoke Matabele, not the Hottentot tongue, because she is a native of Gubuluwayo. One of her neighbours, also a native of Gubuluwayo, came in shortly afterwards; the latter immediately recognized Mr. Helm and greeted him respectfully: "Sakou bona umfundisi! Good-day, master!" Then she looked at me and said to Mr. Helm: "But who is this?" — "He is also an umfundisi, the umfundisi of Gubuluwayo," replied Mr. Helm. "Where is your wife, and where are your children?" asked this curious daughter of Eve. "I have no wife, nor any children," was my reply. — "I suppose you have left them far away in your own country! " "No, I have never had any, nor shall I ever have any... I have sacrificed all that to come here to teach you the way to heaven and to look after you during any illness or misfortune." "Oh! oh! that is most strange, and I don't understand that situation at all." Then Umluka's wife explained to her with great animation, no doubt inspired by her husband's conversations about us, how, for the love of God and of the children of God, the Abafundisi of Gubuluwayo had renounced the joys of family life; that their religion imposed this sacrifice upon them, so that they might be able to devote themselves the more completely to the poor sick people of the town and district. Umluka's neighbor then looked at me with an air of great astonishment and admiration. The good Mr. Helm, who is a most excellent paterfamilias, not quite knowing how to keep himself in countenance, cloaked himself in a great cloud of smoke, and pulled upon his pipe with exceeding vigour.

A few minutes later, we were on the road to Gubuluwayo, at top speed: we feared the arrival of a storm which had been threatening since that morning. At the road which turns off to Induna Hill, the storm burst: in a few minutes we were soaked to the skin. I got down from my old nag, which no longer wished to keep up, and mounted behind Mr. Martin on his horse. We dashed with bent heads, and covered in twenty minutes the six kilometres which still separated us from Mr. Martin's house. We went in with him, dried our clothes a little and drank a most excellent cup of hot tea, which Mrs. Martin, with kind forethought; had had ready for the arrival of her husband and his friends.

## 16. MISSION AT WORK

Gubuluwayo, 19th May, 1880.

Father Law, Father Wehl, and Brothers Hedley and de Sadeleer will soon be leaving for Umzila's Kraal, among the Abagasa people. We have been preparing for the expedition. The season is now favourable. After the summer harvest, agricultural products are very cheap here: so it is a good time to lay in our stocks for the winter. There is no danger that we may die of starvation. Let me give you an idea of the price of food. We have bought some good quality rice at 2 shillings for 60 English pounds; we have laid in sufficient for seven months. Maize costs 3 or 4 shillings for 200 pounds; millet or kaffir-corn is a little dearer. Cattle on the hoof sell for 10 or 12 shillings apiece; mutton 3 to 4 shillings, goats and kids at 2 or 3 shillings. The Transvaal Boers have just discovered a bean which will be most useful in this country. Roasted and ground, it gives the equivalent coffee with quite an aroma.

I have the task of arranging provisions for our different stations. To Father Blanca, at Tati, I send 500 pounds of maize, 100 pounds of rice, 50 of kaffir-corn, 29 huge pumpkins, 10 sheep and two cattle — the whole costing about one hundred francs. I also have plenty of maize and rice for Father Depelchin's two waggons and for Father Law's waggon. For our central house in Gubuluwayo, I have stored away 400 pounds of rice, 400 of maize, 200 of kaffir-corn, 50 pumpkins; hundreds of eggs which I hope to preserve as we do in Europe; our stable contains two cows, three beef cattle, twenty sheep and some poultry. I have calculated that, unless some unexpected happening occurs, our material needs will cost us, until the next harvest, about 1,500 francs — for four missionaries, two servants, the post, etc. This expense may perhaps be further reduced when our garden and our flock become more productive. As you see, we are trying our best to use with great economy the resources which the zeal and charity of our friends in Belgium have placed at our disposal.

What cost us the very eyes in our heads, are those commodities and foodstuffs which come to us from the Cape Colony and from Europe. This is understandable, because all such things have to be brought here by waggons yoked to 16 oxen, guided by some five or six men, over a distance of five to six hundred leagues. So, you will understand how the high cost of transport and the difficulty of communication must augment the price of the goods. Another thing which gives heavy punishment to our budget is the organization of our expeditions by ox-waggon or by bearers, the gifts one must make to the principal local chiefs, the journeys of our missionaries from Europe to the Cape, etc., etc. Were it only a question of continuing to live as we do, in our present somewhat primitive fashion, all would be easy; food here is exceedingly cheap, and would make the poor people in our dear homeland of Belgium weep with envy. In this fertile and tropical country, which only needs to be cultivated in order to produce the richest harvests, in this country which is nearly as big as Europe, there are barely 50,000 inhabitants with a very low standard of living and very limited needs.

## 17. DEATH OF A SLAVE

Gubuluwayo, 29th May, 1880.

I must begin by reassuring you. We learn that the people of Belgium believe that we are prisoners of the Zulus, our persons and our belongings in danger, or, at the least, banished from this country. Thank God, nothing of the kind has occurred, and we do not know who can have started such a rumour. We are still on the best of good terms with His Majesty. The Matabele chief, far from being unkind, holds us in the highest confidence. Instead of cutting off our heads, he prefers to decapitate the bottles of champagne which our waggons have brought up from Kimberley for him. Whenever I go to see him, he invites me into his thatched palace, seats me at his table, that is to say, on the bare ground, and offers me the "plat du jour"... the hollow of his hand, holding a good sized chunk of underdone beef. He also invites me to drink from the royal cup, a calabash well polished with cow-dung; he offers me some of his boer tobacco from the Transvaal; he talks and laughs with me as though I had been at his court for twenty years. So you see that we are not yet very close to martyrdom, unless it is felt that we should not be too trusting to the caresses of a lion.

Besides, once again, quite recently, the Governor General of the British Colonies in South Africa, Sir Bartle Frere, has most particularly recommended us to the prince. Add to that the fact that Lo Bengula seems completely convinced of the great superiority of the white people, a fact that is especially incontestable since the defeat of the Zulus and the capture of Cetewayo.

You must understand that the Matabele king is king in the most absolute and primitive sense of the word, "rex a regere." He reigns, he governs, he himself does all the business of the state, war, finance, internal affairs, external affairs, etc. etc. He can indeed say, better than Louis XIV: "L'Etat, c'est moi."

He is the personification of justice; he alone is the law. Here, there is no parliament, no law-court, no ministers, no control, no press, no public opinion. From his big chair of redwood, in which he sits from the 1st of January to the 31st of December, Lo Bengula is the sole director of all the details of government. He knows all, he hears all, he sees all, he presides over everything, by him everything is carried out, in silence and in shadow, rather after the manner of the Council of Ten in Venice. At this very moment, the wind blows towards many executions for political and other misdemeanours. Several highly influential men have already disappeared since the Great Dance on the 31st January.

Here are a few details about how he proceeds. Last week, the king announced to his subjects that the rivers around Umganin had become infected and that there was evidence that the waters had been poisoned. Soon afterwards, he called together all the men of the neighboring villages, as though for a marauding raid on the frontier. They hastened to Umganin. When all the warriors were ranged in front of him, the king made a sign to his chief witch-doctor. The latter walked up and down among the ranks: he seemed to sniff and to smell out, as it were, the guilty ones who had poisoned the waters of Umganin. Then he stopped suddenly and pointed

to six men. They were removed from the ranks and the six poor devils were killed on the spot.

Recently, our friend Umluka arrived here from the village of the Amazizi; with him rode a witch-doctor who came to ask us for some medicine. The latter had paid court to a girl from a neighboring village. This girl, however, was one of Lo Bengula's wives. She complained to her royal spouse. The latter, cleverly dissimulating, sent a gift of a couple of cattle to the village of the audacious Amazizi.

Two days later, the village chief was ordered to come to Umgani with all his men to thank the king for the fine gift he had given to them. Lo Bengula appeared to receive their thanks with amiability. Soon however, he caught sight of the wretched witch-doctor, who, after the royal gift to his village, suspected nothing, and did not think about the justice and vengeance of the prince.

Lo Bengula suddenly addressed him and accused him of his conduct. The accused denied his guilt. But, after being questioned he realised that all the facts, were known. He hung his head and admitted his guilt.

Then, his brother-in-law, William, the chief witch-doctor, realising that he was to be punished immediately, tried to temporise.

"Sire," said he to Lo Bengula, "in accordance with our customs, it is not lawful to have an execution in this place."

"Let him be taken to the gate of the cattle isibaia," was the reply... Lo Bengula immediately went to the isibaia and ordered the sharpening of a great knife to mutilate the guilty man.

One of the king's brothers intervened and said: "Sire, your father, the great Mosilikatsi, would never have ordered a punishment such as this..." But others there asked for his immediate death.

The king said: "What I order will be done at once." The slave who carried the knife hesitated a moment. The king then ordered another slave to seize the guilty man. There was no getting out of it: they had to obey or die.

That is how justice is carried out here. No light punishments. Only the most frightful tortures and death.

If one must judge the other African peoples by what we witness here, it is indeed no wonder that there is so little increase in their population, but rather a constant diminution, which may even lead to the complete annihilation of whole-tribes.

During a single year, nearly five hundred men among the Matabele have died a violent death; wars and illness have accounted for about as many more, without counting the mortality among women and children: that is to say that there have been more than a thousand deaths in a population of about 40,000. The birth rate is low; raids cannot for ever continue to supply new contingents. If this regime continues for many years, the Matabele nation will perish, as have done so many of the peoples of Africa.

Here, as among the Mahommedan peoples, polygamy is an active cause of ruin and of depopulation.

## 18. VISIT OF THE QUEENS

Gubuluwayo, 30th June, 1880.

On the 3rd of this month, Father Law, in company with Father Wehl, and Brothers Hedley and De Sadleer, set off for the country of Urnzila and the coast of Sofala. Father Depelchin, with two Fathers and two Brothers, has set off for the Zambesi. May God watch over these courageous missionaries during their difficult journeys! Father De Wit and I, with Brothers Proest and Paravicini, remain alone in Gubuluwayo. Since the departure of our colleagues, nothing important has occurred in the monotony of our days.

It is now winter. At midday to-day our thermometer was only 4 degrees above zero; the poor black people, frozen by the cold, shiver in a pitiable manner; they have few fire-places or clothes to keep them warm; and their adipous pigmentation, which makes their skins so dark, while giving them excellent protection from the heat of the sun, does not seem to do much to help them in the cold of their short winters.

Despite the cold weather, I managed to finish, a few days ago, the hut for our leprous catechumen, about whom I have already written to you. In the farthest corner of our cattle kraal, we have built him a fairly solid hut of stone and mortar. Every day, morning and evening, dragging himself painfully along, he brings his little wooden bowl to our door, and Brother Proest fills it with a chunk of corn bread and some pieces of meat. The poor wretch goes off happy: his sad life may thus be a little prolonged. I try to explain to him, as best I may, the essential truths of our religion. The poor devil is very happy when I go and talk awhile with him and keep him company! May God deign to touch his heart!

Three days ago, we had an adventure which might well have had a tragic conclusion. Father De Wit wished to visit the native town and Lo Bengula's palace. It happened that we entered too far within the cattle kraal. This is a sort of sacred place: no profane person may soil it with his presence with impunity. A few black people noticed us: almost instantaneously, there arose the most indescribable tumult. We were arrested by one of the chiefs, and might well have become martyrs to our curiosity.

The Gubuluwayo induna, to whom we tried to give our explanations, did not seem to understand us, and also seemed most ill-disposed towards us. In this pressing danger we had recourse to one of our English friends, a trader who has lived in Gubuluwayo for ten years. This kind Mr. Tainton did us a great service in explaining our case to the induna, and the matter was settled in a friendly way. The induna agreed that the care given by us to the sick people of the tribe merited the gratitude of all the inhabitants of Gubuluwayo; for this decisive reason, he contented himself with the imposition of a fine: we are to pay three cotton blankets and a pound of gunpowder. After that the induna joined us for a cup of coffee and we are to-day the best of friends.

Gubuluwayo, the 12th August, 1880.

I have just finished our little chapel, which will serve us until we can build a church. On the outside it is like an ordinary house: 20 feet long and 10 feet high, three small windows and a thatched roof. Within we have ornamented it as best we could, with the gifts which the kind piety of our Belgian friends bestowed on us at the time of our departure.

A white carpenter, Mr. John Heliat, who was here for a short while, gave me a great deal of help in constructing the sanctuary. I went with him last month to the "Serpents Hill", 'Entab Enioka', about three leagues away, to cut some wood with the authority of the king. The few beams we needed had to be manhandled through the bush and over the streams. It was no easy task, I can assure you, but we feel well rewarded for our trouble.

On our way through the forests of mount Enioka, I greatly admired the beauty of the country: torrents, cascades, beautiful views, luxuriant vegetation. Birds of brilliant plumage made the woods resound with their chirping. One bird in particular especially interested me: it is a crow with a clear call, not unlike our carrion-crow in appearance. It gives a very piercing call at regular intervals; from afar it sounds like a hermitage bell. How poetic that sounds! Yet here there is no one to admire these beauties of nature. The poor blacks wander through these forests, their eyes on the ground, their thoughts fixed grossly on their daily food. They live, they die, like animals, with no thought for the author of their being, the Creator of all things. Jesus Christ alone can snatch them from their bestial blindness.

We shall indeed encounter many difficulties before we shall be able to accustom these people to the ideas and the customs of the Gospel. I recently had a talk with an English trader who has lived in Gubuluwayo for about ten years. Like Mr. Sykes, he said to me, that humanly speaking the missionaries have nothing to hope for, absolutely nothing. "The first Matabele," said he, "that is converted and who wishes to live as a Christian, will be murdered the following day." Yes, the customs and institutions of these people are diametrically opposed to the Christian faith.

We are beginning to be able to express ourselves quite passably in the Matabele tongue and at every opportunity we try to explain to the natives the fundamentals of Christianity. They listen to us: but their mental faculties seem so restricted, they have so few ideas outside the purely material sphere, that they find great difficulty in understanding what we try to explain. They have a vague notion of a supreme Being; but they do not worship their god, nor do they address to him any prayer; Spirits, in a somewhat rough meaning of the word, play a certain part in their religious system. The two festivals in honour of the Spirits of Lo Bengula, of Mosilikatsi, his father, and of Matchoban, his grandfather, and a few superstitious ceremonies accompanied by sorcery and hocus-pocus: that is, I think, the sum total of the religion of these wretched savages.

Add to that a complete lack of intellectual culture, a rather dull mind, no knowledge of the regular divisions of time, no idea of how to calculate, no industry at all, except for those arts which are the most indispensable to life. Ignorant of weeks and years, they mechanically follow

the moons and the two seasons, that of the rains and that of the cold weather; in addition, as a rule, their memories do not seem to extend farther back than about two years.

Every day, numerous visitors come, some to beg, some to sell things, some to be cured from sickness, some just to kill time. For, when not at war, killing time is the principle occupation of the Matabele.

One day, while we were quietly having lunch, there was a great fuss in our courtyard... Kaffirs, dogs, cattle, poultry, all making a great noise. We dashed out to see what was happening... To our great astonishment, we saw two women dressed in huge, scarlet cotton drawers. They were two queens, two of the wives of Lo Bengula: approaching the door of the house, they squatted on the ground in accordance with the etiquette of the country, bowed deeply to us, saying, the one: "Lambile, I am hungry, — the other: Agoempi zinkwa, give me some bread." We offered them a cup of coffee in which Their Highnesses placed a great deal of sugar, but no milk, because milk is reserved for children; then we gave them a slice of bread, which for them is as delicious as cake. This cake, we should explain, is made from maize, rice and wheat flour, mixed together and kneaded with Utywala. They eat the piece of bread slowly and with great delight, saying now and then: "Amakiwa!... Amakiwa! These white men! These white men!..." On learning that the coffee which they like so much is made from their own bean, Intslouwie, roasted, ground and infused in boiling water, they can no longer contain themselves: they are overcome with admiration.

One fine morning, a group of queens, unknown to us, went right into our chapel. We hurried over. They were admiring the altar-cloths, the sacerdotal ornaments, the albs, the chasubles, etc.; everything excited their greed, they wanted to use everything as "limbo", or scraps of cloth. The crucifix, the copper candlesticks, the cruet, etc., they would like to have made into bracelets... can you believe it!... they are quite insatiable. We had to resist them as best we could and keep a strict watch: for, if they can get away with anything, these tricksters simply laugh heartily. They will get away with anything they can. What a strange people! and how shall we ever succeed in teaching them Christian morality?... "Oremus et laboremus."

## 19. THE KING MAKES RAIN

Gubuluwayo, Saturday, 16th October, 1880.

Not long ago a native told us of his intention to become a Catholic, with his family. The report soon got around. We have since learned that he has been blackened and calumniated in a dreadful manner by the rest of the people. Will he have the courage to brave insults and ill-will? And if so, what may be the consequences for him?

We too have enemies who work for the removal of the king's goodwill and esteem for us. I do not think that we need have any fears about our personal safety: but it is not impossible that, one day or another, we might be obliged to leave the country. Meanwhile, we continue on good terms with Lo Bengula.

About the middle of September, the king called me to the White Rocks, Amatje Amhlope. His favourite horse had had its shoulder cut open by an assegai; the wound was so big that it would need to be stitched; the imfundisi must treat the case. He sent his own cart with two fine horses belonging to Mr. Greite, recently returned to Gubuluwayo. In two hours we travelled the twelve miles which separate us from the royal kraal. Lo Bengula received me with great signs of friendship; expressing his gratitude especially after I had succeeded in the surgical operation... I would never have thought that one day I would become veterinary surgeon to an African monarch!...

Gubuluwayo, 1st November, 1880.

To-day, the Feast of All Saints, the poor leper of whom I have already written to you has been baptised. It is exactly one year since I discovered him, abandoned by all and reduced to abject misery. We have spent the entire year teaching him the elements of the catechism. This morning he could not contain himself for joy when he arrived at our chapel, dressed in fine new clothes of white calico, which we had placed yesterday in his hut as a surprise.

I do not doubt that this conversion will bring us good luck and will touch the hearts of some few natives whom God may choose from amongst this pagan people. Indeed, the poor leper has already begun this good work; for some time he has been preaching to his friends when they have come to talk to him from the other side of the wall which encloses our property. He has been evangelising Boschimans, Hottentots, Griquas and other natives who either live here or pass through the Matabele capital. His word, in all probability, creates far more impression on his compatriots than anything we might say or do. As for me, if I gain but this one soul for Jesus Christ, I shall feel well rewarded for my labours.

Gubuluwayo, the 24th November, 1880.

November the 2nd we went to see Lo Bengula at the White Rocks, Amatje Amhlope. We rode there past great masses of tumbled rocks of granite, relics of long past volcanic eruptions; here and there lay scattered blocks of stone, dragged away by the summer torrents, cleft by the sun, entwined with the roots of Mopani trees and wild fig. We reached the kraal towards 9 a.m., and, despite that early hour, we were bathed in sweat from the sun which shone down almost vertically upon our heads, with not even the slightest breeze to refresh us.

Near the royal residence we saw the queens busy about the work of the royal household of Lo Bengula. In addition to the royal guard, we saw a great crowd of Kaffirs who had come to salute the king. On all sides warriors were squatting on their heels: both soldiers and visitors were there, awaiting the royal commands and the abundant food from the king's table. Cattle, sheep and goats, in serried ranks, furnish the pantagruelian feasts of the king of kings, enkos amakos.

We reached the huge cattle-kraal: a hundred Kaffirs were squatting there on their hardened heels, watching the cattle and chatting amongst

themselves." We passed with our heads high, saluting no one... this is their etiquette. On reaching the sheepfold, we fastened our horses in the shade of a great mimosa tree, between the gate of the sheepfold and the thatched palace. Above our heads, great serpents glided about among the leafy branches of the royal tree. One must not fear these sacred reptiles: if you do not annoy them, they will not bite. They are the "Spirits of the ancestors."

Inside the sheep kraal, we saw a great log fire, and on the fire was a huge pot full of boiling water, with the white steam billowing up towards the azure sky. The king was standing in front of the cauldron: with the point of his assegai he was stirring the magic concoction, — the infernal leaven, as the Boers call it, "Helle brood," — in which Lo Bengula has cast mystic plants known only to himself and to the witch-doctors, together with the heart of a hyena and the liver of a boa constrictor.

I asked one of my neighbors what was this strange, superstitious ceremony. He told me that the king was calling up the rain clouds and "making rain". This would appear to be a most difficult operation: the king twists and turns and seems exceedingly agitated. Every now and then, he looks up at the vault of the heavens, then recommences his magic arts; from time to time he wipes away the sweat which collects on the royal forehead. The witch-doctors surround him; the faithful watch from afar, waiting anxiously, quiet and still. Will the rain fall, or will it not fall? To be or not to be, that is the question, as Hamlet said.

We waited by the gate of the kraal, at some distance from the mimosa tree, so that, alas! we had no protection for our sunburnt faces but the shade of our hats. Presently, the king caught sight of us: he seemed somewhat embarrassed to be thus surprised by the white men whilst doing sorcery. Leaving the magic cauldron, he came straight over to us. We greeted him with a ceremonious salute and a slight smile. We shook his hand, English fashion. Then, in order to make him a little more at ease, I went over and said to him:

"Sir, it seems to me that your belt is a little old and worn: for so great a prince this does not seem suitable at all."

"Have you anything better, Umfundisi?" replied the king.

I put my hand in the pocket of my coat. With a broad smile, Lo Bengula watched me take out a small roll, wrapped in paper. His Majesty's eyes opened wide when the little roll became, in my fingers, a long strip of very fine silk, a magnificent scarf or shawl more than two metres in length. This most brilliant product of British India I placed around the king's ample shoulders. A slave ran to fetch a mirror and Lo Bengula admired himself with a certain coquettery. After that we took our leave of the king and rode off back to Gubuluwayo.

Yesterday evening, Lo Bengula arrived here from the White Rocks. He brought with him the rain for his people. For, among the Matabele, it is the king who "makes the rain and the fine weather." The monarch had chosen his time of arrival with care: the king made his solemn entry into his capital in the midst of a tremendous storm. He arrived, seated majestically upon a white stallion. One would have said that it was Napoleon at Wagram. All Gubuluwayo was afoot. Despite the persistent and heavy rain, popular dances began that same evening. The national song: Nantzi

indaba, Here is the news!... was intoned by all the warriors there and accompanied by the noisy rattle of their assegais on their shields and by the sound of a thousand savage feet pounding the earth and churning the mud.

Every year the arrival of the king and the rain forms a small festival. For the rain is the gift of the king, a pledge of the harvest to come after eight months of desolating dryness.

This morning, when I went to the thatched palace, wishing to present my respects to His Majesty, I met the king near the cattle kraal, the isibaia, which corresponds to the "templum" of the Romans. Twelve black cattle, six sheep and six goats were ranged in front of him. In one hand Lo Bengula held his assegai, in the other his magic staff. He was making his annual prayer to the Spirits.

I could not completely understand all the wording of this solemn invocation, although the king announced it successively four times to the four corners of the heavens. Here, however, is the rough meaning of the formula:

"Oh great Spirits (of my father and of my grandfather), I thank you because you have, during the past year, granted my people more corn than to the Mashonas, my enemies. This year, also, in gratitude for these twelve black cattle which I consecrate to you, see to it that we may be the best fed and the strongest of all the peoples of the world!... I thank you for not being like Khama, the king of the Bamangwatos, who is a weak and cowardly man. Grant that I may always remain the bravest and the most powerful of kings! I thank you for having granted me success and victory in the last war! Receive my thanks for the one thousand head of cattle and for the two hundred women and children, the glorious spoils which you have given to us! Make me even more powerful in the future, so that this year I may bring back to the conquering Matabele a still richer booty than in all the years since my ascent to the throne."

Thus spoke Lo Bengula, and his great voice echoed afar over the boundary of the kraal.

After that, the king and his witch-doctors carried out a ceremony similar to a blessing of the flocks and herds. Then the twelve cattle were sacrificed one by one. They were then cut open and the entrails were placed on the twelve hides, to remain within the kraal for a day and a night. The Spirits must have the first choice of what they wanted from these generous offerings. The next day, the people would be allowed to share out the flesh of the victims happy in the fact that the Spirits, with great abstemiousness, would not have touched the offerings.

Was this a religious festival? Or was it merely the Joyous Entry of the king, bringing with him the rain and inviting all his people to rejoice at this great event? I could not say. The Matabele are very mysterious and very circumspect. They scarcely speak at all about their customs to a stranger: often, when you question them, they take great care to bewilder you, by contradicting one another.

The rainy season has now been with us for some days; these rains being generally preceded by a number of passing thunderstorms. During the month of August, flames rose up from all the hills around Gubulwayo — a most wonderful sight. They had set fire to the veldt. Every year,

in this way, they rid the soil of the old, tall grass which the cattle can neither eat nor trample. The veldt grass usually grows about 2½ metres high. The thatching grass which covers our chapel is eight feet long; on Mr. Helm's roof, some of the grass is as much as twelve feet long; and Mr. Elliott even has some which is 14 feet long. When one sees from afar these prairies covered with this gigantic grass, one is carried back involuntarily to the early ages of our world, as though one lived amidst the flora of the tertiary earth.

With the coming of the first rains, everything changes in these fields rendered desolate by the dryness and by the heat of the sun.

Gubuluwayo is now a veritable paradise. What a pity it is that the natives can neither appreciate nor use this splendid richness! The day before yesterday I planted some potatoes: to-day already the first leaves are appearing; in a day or so I shall have to draw the earth up around the stalks; quite soon I shall need to prune them; and, in a matter of weeks, I shall be able to harvest them. Here one can sometimes detach some of the stalks of the potato, replant them, and new tubers will develop. Recently I planted ten big trees in our courtyard: this being much simpler to do than in Belgium. One can saw off the trunk close to the ground, plant it in the soil, and behold one has a fine tree which roots again without even losing its leaves, and which is likely to produce fruit within a year. The natives have brought me four tree aloes, in full flower: one is 12 feet high, the others 6 feet. Not far from our house we can admire some euphorbias which are more than thirty feet high; their wide crowns are not unlike those of some of our finest oaks in Belgium.

The hunters who have just returned to Gubuluwayo, to spend the rainy season here, have had quite a good hunting season. There are eighteen white hunters in the country; between them they have accounted for a hundred elephants, about two hundred ostriches, and about twenty rhinoceros and hippopotamus. Small game, such as giraffe, antelope and fox, they do not count. They killed up to seven lions in one day; the hunters tell us that these beasts vary in species: some have a thick black mane, others have not.

Shortly before the rainy season, the impi or army of Gubuluwayo set off once again to ravage the country of the Mashona. They took off more than a thousand head of cattle, and brought a hundred women and children as slaves back to the capital. We saw them return triumphant to the town, loaded with booty: they sang their national song: Nantzi indaba! Indaba iemkonto! Here is the news! The news of the assegai!

## 20. THE KING VISITS THE MISSION

Gubuluwayo, 27th November, 1880.

Therm. 15' to 38'. Rain since 1st. January.: 1 metre, 0 dec, 235.

King Lo Begula has done us the rare and signal honour of coming to pay us an official visit with all his court. Whilst this great event is still fresh in my mind, I do not wish to go to bed before writing down the story of this famous day. I shall describe the royal visit to you in detail.

This morning I went to the king to give him the copper collar for the noble "Prince", the fine dog which Father Law has given as a present to the Matabele chief.

I found His Majesty in the middle of the public square: he was amusing himself watching some children dance. As soon as he saw me he called me over, and, showing me the children who were jumping around with spirit, he said to me: "There is the hope of our nation."

"Sire", I replied, "I could tell you a great deal on this subject. Many of those poor children die at an early age because you haven't here, what we, the Catholic Europeans, have all over Europe, great houses where wise and virtuous "misses" take care of the old people, the sick, and above all, of the children." The Kaffirs call all European ladies "misses".

"Do you say so?" replied the king, clapping me on the shoulder. Then he continued quietly to watch the children play. Later we talked about horses, cattle, the rain, above all the rain, the great question of the moment for a lazy people which does not know the maxim of Christian morality: "Help thyself, and Heaven will give thee help."

"Do you see," said the king to me, "those horses over there who are grazing in the veldt? Are they not magnificent? That great black horse is worth 400 pounds of ivory. Where is your own horse? Ah, there it is peacefully cropping the grass by the mimosa tree. Frankly, you have a very poor mount... would you like my black horse?"

I did not however wish to accept the royal gift. I had other things in view.

"Sire", I went on a few minutes later, "when will you pay us the visit which you deigned to promise us last winter?"

"Si ghamba, ghamba sambi, this very instant," said the king, "let us go now, come with me," he went on, shaking me by the hand.

Great was the astonishment of the indunas who were standing some distance away, when they saw Lo Bengula calling them to follow him towards our house. All together, they cried repeatedly: "He! he! Balete, Koumalo, Matchoban. See! See! the prince advances, the great king, the son of Matchoban!" This is the custom of the country: as soon as the monarch appears in public or begins to walk, his subjects always accompany him with these marks of respect and of honour. They escorted us as far as the house.

When we came around the rock which is close to the entrance through the fence, I said to the king, showing him the house:

"Sir, there is Mr. Greite's house! "

"Not at all, it is yours", replied Lo Bengula, smiling in a kindly fashion. "It is true that, with your permission, we have bought it from Mr. Greite. But we do realise that this property, with all the buildings which you have allowed us to erect, belongs to the king, as does all the land of the Matabele: it is for him to dispose of it as he wills."

"That is well said", replied the king, "Umfundisi, be easy in your heart: *occupy your house in peace!*" These last words signify among the Matabele the most explicit free gift which the king can bestow. Then we entered the property.

Warned by our black servants of the arrival of the king, Brother Proest, who had long wished to meet Lo Bengula and to do him honour, had

quickly prepared the coffee and biscuits which we kept ready for such a solemn occasion.

The good Brother, being a little flurried, said to the king: "Hamba goesle", that is to say, "go away!" instead of "Sala goesle, be welcome!" But the king immediately understood the "quiproquo"; he laughed and sat down solemnly in the middle of the room; the indunas arranged themselves around, close to the walls.

I went off to look for a bottle of old "blandy" and a flagon of Cape wine, carefully kept for the royal visit.

I presented the wine to the king and some cakes made with eggs. Lo Bengula would not touch them. Then I offered him a glass of "blandy". He barely touched it with his lips, then passed it to the indunas.

I realised that he did not wish to take anything in front of his people, and I put the flagons away.

Then I suggested to the king that we should inspect the new buildings and the chapel, and that afterwards we should have our coffee and rolls. "Yebo! That is good!" said he. He rose, and the "He! He! Koumalo, etc." began again with great enthusiasm.

First we went into the photographic studio which I had set up a few days earlier. I had prepared a "dark room." I placed the king in a suitable position.

"Kiuni? kiuni? What is this?" said the prince.

"Sire", I replied, "you will see that I can make both night and day as I please." Then, pressing a button, I showed him, on a great sheet of white paper, panorama of the environs of Gubuluwayo.

"Umtagati" said Lo Bengula, "you are a sorcerer!" and he left the room, astounded by the science of the White people.

Then we went to Father Berghegge's room, for whom Lo Bengula has much friendship. The king cast admiring glances at a great pair of hunting boots hanging from the wall. Father Berghegge gallantly offered the boots to His Majesty who had never possessed anything like them. The king appeared much flattered by this delicate attention.

"Ah! I shall look very fine with these magnificent "amaniatelo"." Indeed, he would look fine, Lo Bengula, in these great waterproof boots,... and no trousers!

Afterwards we went to visit our chapel. I was a little worried about this, but thank God, everything went off all right.

We entered the chapel one by one. It is a modest room, the walls plastered with brown clay, and it is lit by four glassed windows. The altar is raised a step above the floor. Along the walls are hung pictures representing the Fourteen Stations of the Cross.

"Ho! ho!" said the king, "what is that?" and he went from one station to the other, full of admiration and of questions. A mulatto and I explained the pictures to him.

Finally, Lo Bengula reached the Crucifixion; he counted the nails, the thorns, and touched the wound in the side of the Divine Saviour... Ah! if only God would touch the heart of this poor prince!... Then he began to protest against the infamous barbarity of the white people who had so cruelly tortured the Saviour. I replied that God had allowed it thus; that His Son Jesus Christ had wished to suffer all that for us, for him Lo Ben-

gula, for his people, in order to expiate our sins. The king seemed deeply moved.

At the last station, I told him how, on the third day, Christ arose by his own power, showed himself to men for forty days, and sent out the apostles, or abafundisi, to preach throughout the world the religion of the True God, and to do good amongst all men as he had done.

The king listened to my words with kind attention. We had spent almost an hour in the chapel, and Lo Bengula was deeply impressed.

"And now your room?" said the king, "where is your own room?" "Sire, I have no proper room: I live in the pharmacy and I sleep on your powders." He smiled.

"Let us see it!" said he. We went into the pharmacy. He was astounded by the great number of small phials:

"Are all these drugs? Imite Unke? for me and for my people?"

"Yes", I said, "all that is to cure the sick among your people."

"That is good", he replied.

I showed him the "magic bottle", the flagon of concentrated ammonia, which some of the queens had wished to smell a few days previously: they had almost fallen backwards and had thought that there was a devil in the bottle.

The king had laughed heartily at this adventure: but he himself would not expose his royal nose to the effects of the "pungent and smelly devil". He was content with admiring the science of the white people.

Then he drew aside the curtain which separates my bedroom from the pharmacy and went to seat himself on my mattress which was placed on a couple of packing-cases; my bed nearly collapsed beneath the weight of His Majesty.

His suite had remained outside.

"Now", said the king, "where are the coffee and bread?"

Brother Proest immediately brought the luncheon and the wine: the king did honour to our food. He began to eat and drink with a Matabele appetite which was a pleasure to watch: he asked for a second helping of bread, sugar and coffee. The king will not deign to eat in the presence of his people. He makes a point of ruling, speaking and walking without taking either food or drink; but once out of their sight, and he makes up for it. The Kaffirs can be either gluttons or sober according to circumstances.

Whilst he ate I talked about the project which Father Depelchin had conceived a long while ago, but for which we had not yet felt the time was sufficiently ripe. I was anxious to prepare in advance the means of fulfilling it: that is to say, the building of a hospital and the introduction of some Sisters of Charity to look after our poor savages.

"Sir", said I, seeing that he was now so well disposed, "we would like to build a very big house, near to your palace, a house such as one sees in the country of the white people." "Yebo? Well?" said he questioningly.

"And in this house we would like to have some "misses", religious ladies who would take care of the sick, the old and the children."

"These "misses" are they your wives?" asked the king.

"No, sire. These "misses" have neither husbands nor children, just as we have neither wives nor children. They would work, as we do, solely for the

good of your people and for the King on high. It is for this that we have left our own country, which is far away to the north, our homes, our possessions, our relatives, our brothers, our sisters, and our friends, to come among you and to live and die with your people."

"Ah! that is very good. And what would these women do?"

"They would take in sick children and women, old people, the wounded, all those wretched people who now die in misery in their unhealthy huts, and these charitable women would cure them. Indeed, I should like very much to build a house like this for your people. But not yet... because we have not enough money. Our journey here has cost much, as well as our expeditions to the Zambesi and to the country of Umzila. Later, perhaps, when we have the money, I shall ask you for permission to build this house."

"Yebo! That is good!" said the king, after thinking awhile, "we shall see later on."

I did not wish at the time to make a more definite request, because this project must be most carefully thought out; besides it would not have been very polite to make such a request while the king was thus honouring us by being our guest. I merely wished to launch a sort of experimental balloon.

How wonderful it would be if we could establish an orphanage, a school, a hospital! How persuasive would be the preaching, the devotion and the charity of our good Sisters! Let us pray that God may hasten that day!

I then led the prince into our garden. I showed him our potatoes, covered with flowers, and our fine spring onions; our strawberry plants are growing fast and promise us good fruit. I explained to the king that I had sown radishes, beans etc. and that I would soon have some delicious wild spinach; also that I hoped to obtain, as Mr. Helm has done, peaches and apricots which would rival the best grown in Europe.

After that the king went off to his palace, accompanied as when he arrived by all the indunas singing his praises as before. In saying good-bye, he expressed his great pleasure in the very agreeable hours which he had spent with us.

Let us hope that this royal visit will do some good to our Mission, and that it will help a little to hasten the time when we shall really be able to get work on the difficult task of converting these poor people.

## 21. THE END OF GU - BULAWAYO

Gubuluwayo, 1st February, 1881.

We have been in Gubuluwayo for more than sixteen months now, and during that time, although we have made scarcely any conversions among the Matabele, we have not lost either our time or our trouble. Beginnings are always difficult: and that is particularly true with regard to the establishment of Christianity amongst savage tribes which haven't even the faintest tinge of civilisation. It is only by an unshakeable patience, and by being always ready to profit by the hour marked out by the Divine

Bounty, that we can hope to see one day the conversion of these poor people, situated an the very lowest point of brutality and of degradation.

I must add a few supplementary details about the annual solemn feasts of the Matabele. I should like to correct a few of my remarks of last year.

This year I have better understood some details about this feast, and I am beginning to understand the meaning of the ceremonies and superstitions amongst these Kaffirs. As I had already warned you, one must be wary about one's first impressions. These people are so strange to us, their habits, customs, ideas and idioms are so different from our European ideas and customs, that one needs to live among them for a long time before understanding their social organisation.

As a general rule: "Always be wary about the accounts of European travellers who have made but a short sojourn among these savage tribes." In order to speak authoritatively one must spend a very long time with them, one must study their language, one must observe with patience and attention the daily details of their social and domestic life.

It is always after the first winter moon that the Feasts of the Great and Small Dances take place, on days determined by the king and his witch-doctors. The more I study the habits and customs of the Matabele, the more I perceive traces of a primitive religion changed by innumerable superstitions.

On the evening of the day prior to the Feasts, at Ishoshani, the women place vessels of milk before the entrance to the king's enclosure, the isibaia. An old witch-doctor takes the pots inside the isibaia, sprinkles them with water and recites magic formulae over the milk, which will be drunk the next day by the children of Gubuluwayo.

The women return a second time, bearing calabashes of milk which the witch-doctor puts in a place of safety; then, when the milk has curdled, all the women of the town, dressed in cattle hides, go to the kraal to which the king has withdrawn himself. They begin to dance with great frenzy, asking the king to be good enough to go with them to the isibaia of Gubuluwayo; the king makes them wait there, sometimes for as long as two or three days.

The feast of the Little Dance was celebrated on the 29th and 30th December of 1880. In order to see the spectacle and study it at my ease, I placed myself by a kopje close to the route which the royal procession would follow. First came a batallion of Matabele, marching in three companies commanded by their officers. There followed the king's wagon, drawn by sixteen light brown oxen. The prince sat nonchalantly in his chariot upon a lion skin; he chatted with his favourite queen, and occasionally addressed a few words to Imniamante, his daughter, aged thirteen, dressed in the garments of a white woman. Alongside the chariot walked the queens, the officers and employes of the court, the cook, the majordomo, Maltan, who carried on his shoulders a white box, Lo Bengula's throne; a slave led on a leash the dog Prince, given to the king by Father Law. Prince recognised me and ran over to lick my hand.

As he passed me, the monarch saluted me with a gracious smile; the procession continued across the plain and Lo Bengula alighted in front of his kraal. After that commenced the dances, the military manoeuvres,

the single combats, the tourneys in which the warriors displayed their skill with the assegai before the applause of the assembled multitude.

The "Little Dance" lasts only two days; immediately afterwards the whole Court is on holiday. All business is put aside until the next full moon, and on the third day the king goes off to his kraal at the "White Rocks".

It is customary for all the missionaries and for all the European residents to go then to visit him. In conformity with this custom, I set off on the 6th January for the "White Rocks, Amatje Amhlope", with a Transvaal Boer called Salomon Vermaak. The prince received me graciously, promising me his protection and saying that he would see me soon in Gubulwayo.

A few days later, Lo Bengula came to his capital for the ceremonies of the Great Dance which began on the 12th January 1881. Allow me to refer you back to my description of last year, only adding some details about the Matabele religion which had escaped me at that time.

The prince carried out the same sacrifices and recited the same prayers to the Spirits of his fathers. In this belief in the "Spirits" I have noticed a vague conception of a Supreme Being, an "Umlimo Pesulo", a King on High. In certain circumstances, the old men address prayers to the good and evil Spirits. The children, the young people and the grown men neither know nor recite any prayer, but there is among them a sort of religious fear. There is no task more difficult than the task of learning about the religion of these people.

Here is a translation of the "National Hymn" of the Matabele, which I continually heard during these celebrations:

Nantzi indaba, dzi dzi!  
Oho! oho! nantzi indaba,  
Dzi, dzi! nantzi indaba,  
Indaba iemkonto, dzi, dzi!

Here is the news, dzi, dzi!  
Oho! oho! here is the news,  
Dzi, dzi! here is the news,  
The news of the assegai, dzi, dzi!

Uoze ubone kiti gwa Zoulou,  
Uoze ubone indaba izizou,  
Oho! kugnar imuntu, dzi,dzi!

Here we come, the Zulus,  
Here we bring the news of others.  
Oho! no other people will come,  
dzi, dzi!

Refrain: Nantzi indaba, etc.

Refrain: Here is the news, etc.

Indaba kwa Matchoban, dzi, dzi!

The news of the people of Matcho-  
ban, dzi, dzi!

Uoze ubone, uoze ubone!  
Nantzi indaba Matchoban!  
Kugnar imuntu, dzi,dzi!

Come and see, come and see!  
Here is the news of Matchoban!  
No other people will come, dzi, dzi!

Refrain: Nantzi indaba etc.

Refrain: Here is the news, etc.

Inkosi Matchoban, silos imniama!	Matchoban is the chief, the black lion!
Silos imniama, sign Matchoban, dzi, dzi!	The black lion, it is Matchoban, dzi, dzi!
Silos imniama, sign Matchoban, Inkosi Matchoban.	The black lion, it is Matchoban, The great chief Matchoban.
Refrain again.	
Ah! slanabantu, oho, oho, oho!	Ah! it kills men, oho, oho, oho!
Ah! slanabantu, dzi,dzi!	Ah! it kills men, dzi, dzi!
Intonga iamokos, oho, oho, oho!	The spear of the chief, oho, oho!
Oho, slanabantu ye, dzi,dzi!	Oho, it kills men, dzi,dzi!
Refrain again.	

One must admit that this is poetry at its most primitive: it does not shine either through abundance of ideas or through the elevation of its thoughts and feelings! But it produces a most powerful effect on these savages, who are really great children, delighting to repeat, without ceasing, the same words, rather in the same manner as the children in the streets of Brussels repeat the refrain "Nicolas! Nicolas! "

This warlike hymn of the Matabele is sung by thousands of voices; it is somewhat monotonous, having but three notes, with the addition of the interjection oho! and the whistling cry dzi, dzi! It makes a tremendous impression on the Kaffirs and carries them away into paroxysms of warlike enthusiasm.

About the middle of December, Lo Bengula gave us a very fine horse for our own use. Some days later, he put in my charge his nephew, a man of some 30 years of age, badly wounded in the arm by a bullet, during their war with the Mashonas. Seeing the uselessness of the remedies of the witch-doctors, the king said: "Take him to the Umfundisi, let him stay there and the Umfundisi will look after him."

## 22. THE KING HOLDS COURT

Gubuluwayo, the 1st March, 1881.

Because of the events in the Transvaal, our post now only goes once a month, instead of once-a fortnight; for some weeks we have had no letters either from Europe or from the Cape. We must hope that our communications with the civilized world will soon be re-established.

Quite recently, His Majesty, the king of the Matabele held audience not in his hut, but in his palace, that is to say, in his cottage at Gubuluwayo.

Father Berghegge and I asked to be presented to him with several other Europeans.

Imagine to yourself a modest Flemish farm house in red brick, covered with a roof of thatch: it has only one floor, with a verandah in front resting on four tree trunks. First one enters a hall, or rather a dark, narrow passage from which two small rooms open on each side, each so

low that you can touch the ceiling with your hand. The first room on the right is a sort of charnel-house, where chunks of raw meat, animal heads, remains of meals etc., are all piled up pell-mell. The smell is enough to turn one's stomach and makes the whole palace stink. The second room on the right is a sort of stone-room, or rather an old clothes shop in which old uniforms of Colonial soldiers have become a prey to the ants and the rats. On the left a door opens into the throne room; take care as you enter not to fall over the squatting courtiers or the calabashes of beer, or the boots and pipes of His Majesty, or the wooden bowls and other household utensils necessary for these receptions.

In the middle of the room one can see a heavy table which served formerly as a transport chest in the heavy commercial wagons. Behind the table, in a great leathern armchair of which the back is adorned with a crown, the king of the Matabele is haughtily seated. We had taken the precaution of sending him in advance several bottles of Cape wine, and thanks to this thought, we were most graciously welcomed by the king. We took our places beside Messrs. Fairbairn and Martin and waited until the king should deign to address us.

When we had arrived at the palace, we found the corridor already filled with beggars and with litigants who came to make requests or to ask for justice. They were brought one by one into the throne room and we were thus present at this curious procession of African lawsuits.

One of the litigants explained to the king that he had been deceived at his marriage: he thought he was marrying a young girl and his fiancée had long passed maturity. He had not yet paid his dowry of two head of cattle to the parents of the *young* girl. The king granted him a divorce and the happy spouse retired, rubbing his hands and making numerous bows before His Majesty.

Another had been hit with a knobkerrie the previous night: his head was badly bashed, but, not knowing who had hit him, he came to His Majesty for justice. Lo Bengula quickly sent him about his business with a few jokes at his expense.

A third possessed a cow which had just had a calf: the latter was black save for a great white mark around the right eye; it had been stolen from him; he begged the king to order that the calf should be returned to him. Lo Bengula replied that he would see to his case... he added, however, that he could not be expected to recognise individually all the beasts of all his subjects; but he promised to make an enquiry into the matter. — And so it went on, at least a dozen cases concluded in a few minutes.

As soon as he had finished, Lo Bengula turned to us with a beaming smile, saying that we must be "Omile" or dry; at the same time he made a sign to an induna seated in a corner of the room. The induna immediately fetched for us a huge pot of beer which must have contained at least ten litres. We exclaimed with surprise whilst admiring the prince's generosity! The king said pleasantly that he would join the party and would help us to empty the huge pot of beer. "Bring a bowl to each of these gentlemen", said he to the induna, and then he poured us out some of the beer. After two hours of fairly lively conversation, as we were seated on the ground, one of us, feeling a little stiff tried to change his position, and unfortunately upset one of the bowls; the king burst out laughing at his clumsiness

and pulled his leg. For a native, however, this would have been a hanging matter; for us Europeans, the punishment was merely the broad jests of His Majesty. But how surprised we were when we saw the induna's daughter cast herself on the ground, greedily licking the floor in the places where the beer had been spilt. You see, the court of the king of the Matabele is indeed a primitive court, even more primitive than the court of the good king Dagobert.

After this Lo Bengula left the room. However, etiquette demanded that we must await his return. Nevertheless, Mr. Fairbairn went out of the room for a moment and then returned again almost immediately. After that, we too were obliged to go outside: but once outside we sent the king's eldest daughter to tell Mr. Fairbairn "that it was only polite that someone should remain there until the king's return." Mr. Fairbairn was obliged to stay there gnashing his teeth for four long hours. He found the joke a bit too much, and swore, though a little late in the day, that he would never be caught like that again!

### 23. STRANGE EVENTS

Gubuluwayo, the 7th April, 1881.

Let me tell you of a few recent happenings here at our house. During the rainy season, wolves and hyenas come prowling every night around the mission. A fortnight ago, these brutes had got into one of the town sheep-pens and had wrought great damage. They were also threatening our own flock: so I resolved to give them a lesson. I was given a half of a pig, the remains of a recent feast by the hyenas; I put a good dose of strychnine in it and placed it close to the entrance of our enclosure. Towards midnight, horrible howls announced the arrival of the enemy. I made the dogs keep quiet, and the hyenas, attracted by the smell, soon arrived at the place where their last meal awaited them. A few minutes later, horrible grunts, mingled with dreadful cries, proved to us that the poison was doing its work. Early next morning, our servants came knocking at my door, saying that the "great sorceress" was dead, and calling to me to come and see her. I followed them: an enormous female hyena lay about fifty paces away from the spot where she had devoured the pig poisoned with strychnine; she measured five feet three inches from nose to tail. I ordered the servants to drag the corpse inside our enclosure, to the great horror of the Matabele who believe that the spirits of the dead enter into the bodies of the hyena. Taking hold of my brushes and paints, in less than an hour I had done a water-colour. The hyena of southern Africa differs considerably, both by the colour of its hair and by the shape of its head, from its Asian counterpart, which we see in our European zoos. By midday, with the help of the sun and the vultures, nothing remained of the animal but its dried bones. I would gladly have shot a few of these vultures: but during the rainy season we are forbidden to shoot. That might "prevent the rain from coming" as the Kaffirs say. Most unfortunately, one of the wolves which had, the previous night, devoured the poisoned pig, had thought fit to vomit a piece of the poisoned flesh; this piece was picked up and eaten a

little later by the magnificent dog belonging to our friend Mr. Tainton. Poor Toussa quickly succumbed to the effects of the strychnine and died in dreadful pain to our great sorrow and regret.

Here, however, is an event which is serious in quite another way and which will give you a rather sad idea of the social life of our poor blacks.

A week ago, during the night, our dogs gave the alarm. I leaped out of bed, seized my rifle and went out into the courtyard. The dogs led me in the darkness to the enclosing wall, then stopped suddenly. A plaintive voice was heard... "Ubani na, who is there?" I cried. Soon I could just see a woman crouched against the fence, and I recognized her as the mother of a sick Kaffir who is staying with us to be cured by the white man's medicine. I felt pity for the poor wretch and took her to her son's hut, at the far end of our enclosure. An hour later, the dogs barked again. I went out again to the courtyard and saw the poor mother trying to get out. "Why", I asked, "do you want to go off like this in the night?" "I am frightened", said she, "I am frightened: if they find me, they will surely kill me." I suspected some mystery and made her go off to an isolated hut. Next morning, I went to see her with her son and found her crouching on her mat. I told the son to bring her some food. "Esaba, I am frightened", said he. I was angered by his lack of feeling and scolded him for his cruelty to his mother. Again I questioned the woman and learned that her husband was accusing her of having bewitched his kraal and was seeking to put her to death.

The next day we heard that an armed band had followed her trail past our house and had gone on towards "Entab Enioka", the Hill of the Serpents. In a neighboring village these men had "put the question", that is to say that they had seized several people whom they suspected of having succoured the woman and had bound them to trees. We agreed, her son and I, that the poor woman must escape the following night. Before she left I gave her a big meal. Then she asked me for a knife. As the son reassured me that she was not contemplating suicide and that she needed the knife merely to procure food for herself, I gave her the knife and an assegai. At midnight, when all was silent, the poor wretch left our enclosure and disappeared into the neighboring wood. As she left, she said to me: "Esaba, I am frightened; Invanga gatchu nanga, the moon has not yet set." Her son gave her a few words of encouragement, and I told her to place herself under the protection of the great God of heaven and earth. She wept and then left us. Her son and a slave accompanied her for some distance from the town. The two men returned after about a quarter of an hour. Since that time, the son has received no food at all from his father and is entirely in our charge. When the matter becomes public knowledge, I would like to speak about it to king Lo Bengula; but we must exercise great care, and we must beware of meddling too closely in the affairs of the natives.

Another point about their customs. As you know the Amazisis are a people of the Fingo race. They became detached from the main tribe of the Amazisis and arrived long ago from the Cape Colony. They are witch-doctors by profession. A year ago they lost their chief. The eldest son, who became chief Witch-doctor, inherited all his father's goods, that is to say all the wealth of these people. Nine men of this tribe claimed to have an

equal share, according to the law of the South. Quarrels and law-suits followed. The Amazisis became divided in two parts, and, of the nine litigants, several have already disappeared. One died of a bullet in the head; another was hit with a knobkerrie and died of his wounds; a third was pierced by an assegai and is now in grave danger of death. The opposition will end by completely exterminating the *nine*.

Just now, the whole population of Gubuluwayo has deserted the town: they have gone out to the lands to guard the maize crop against the greed of the birds. For this, they make use of magical operations and offer mysterious prayers. In the evening they light great fires; the smoke is a part of their magic art.

Brother Nigg arrived back in Gubuluwayo on the 26th January, with Father Depelchin; he is beginning to recover from the sickness contracted during his expedition last year to the Zambesi. Father Depelchin, our Father Superior, left us at the end of March, but Brother Nigg is still with us; he is looking after our dairy herd and our poultry-yard: 5 cows, 11 sheep, 4 calves, 4 pigs, 10 goats, 50 hens and pigeons, etc., etc. We have in abundance milk, butter, cheese, and eggs.

I have bought two fine cows which Father Depelchin wishes to take with him to Panda-Ma-Tenka. What an indefatigable missionary is he, now sixty years old, and about to set off for the country of the Marotse. What unconquerable courage! What unshaken faith in God! As for me, I stay on in Gubuluwayo; I look after the material interests of my colleagues; I try to keep up our good relationships with king Lo Bengula and with our European friends; I continue to look after the sick who swarm to us from all parts of the country. I try to perfect myself in the language of the country; but nothing that I can do can compare with the fatigue and the suffering endured by our missionaries on the banks of the Zambesi and in the country of Umzila.

## 24. TEACHING THE YOUNG

Gubuluwayo, 5th May, 1881.

For five months now no letter from Belgium has been able to reach us: the Boers have occupied Zeerust and have intercepted all communications. We hope soon to receive all the delayed mail together. The latest post brought news that the service has been begun again through the Transvaal, between Kimberley and Shoshong.

The day before yesterday, the 3rd May, I went with Mr. Tainton to make my usual fortnightly call on the king. His Majesty is staying at the White Rocks at the moment. When we arrived, the king was seated in his wagon, in the middle of the kraal; he was greatly enjoying some pieces of meat which the women were serving to him. From the top of the wagon, Lo Bengula extended affectionately to us his hand all dripping with grease, for His Majesty knows no fork other than his five fingers. Mr. Tainton and I sat down unceremoniously in the shade of the wagon, and presently the slave, Diamond, brought us a dish of meat freshly cooked in the royal kitchen... A few small worms were taking a walk over the meat, but

we kept our faces straight. I should explain that the Matabele are extremely fond of meat which is somewhat high. The sort of meat which we would hasten to place in the rubbish-pit, the Kaffirs make into a tasty stew. To refuse this fine dish would be an insult to the prince. "How are you getting it down?" said I to Mr. Tainton. "Like 'on wheels', he replied, "the worms are rolling it away." Fortunately a second and third course arrived to reward us for our courage.

After the meal, the witch-doctors, followed by the son of the god Mashoena, called Tschioukwa, came along to give us a performance. About a dozen of them clapped their hands and sang at the top of their voices, with a sort of drum called an ingoumm as accompaniment. In their midst, the god danced, leaped, yelled, rushed around madly like a demon; this performance lasted almost for three hours. Lo Bengula, Mr. Tainton and I, seated in front of the royal tent, watched this strange spectacle while chatting and smoking our pipes. Towards the end of the performance, the king said to me: "Umfundisi, this is a religious custom: will you not now do the same for us as a minister of religion?" "Sire", I replied, "Catholic priests do not wish to deceive the people by false and absurd superstitions; and when it is desirable to give them pleasure and amusement, the Europeans have far pleasanter music for them to hear." The king smiled and spoke no more about his god Mashoena. After having talked with him a little longer, we took our leave of the prince.

Since the conversion of our poor, dear leper, of whom I have so often spoken to you and who perseveres admirably in his religious progress, we have not, despite all our efforts, succeeded in making any other conversions among the natives. Yet we are not without hope. At the moment I am busy instructing a Kaffir and his children. These are my three neophytes. The elder of his sons is 8 years of age, the other 7. Their father brought them to me this week and I am busy building for them a small hut within our enclosure. The father is a Kaffir from the south, his wife is a Matabele woman, and they have placed their children in our care until they reach majority, that is to say, until about 15 or 16 years of age. The father seems to be intelligent and well disposed: he seems to understand the truths of our Christian religion. But I feel that it would be wiser to test him further and not to baptize him until after the hunting season, towards the end of this year. Every day I teach the children and, with the help of God, I hope to make them our future catechists. For my part I also profit by their presence and their daily lessons to learn more thoroughly the kaffir language. Believe me, one needs both time and hard work to become proficient in these idioms, because we have neither grammar, nor dictionary nor books of any kind at all. In order to understand perfectly the Matabele people, and to make oneself perfectly understood by them, one would need to live amongst them for very many years, so as to enter into their habits and customs and social life.

For nearly two years I have lived in this country and, frankly, I would find myself somewhat embarrassed were I asked to give you full information about the laws, the customs and the habits of the Matabele. These people are cautious, even mysterious; they do not communicate with strangers with facility. One must also be on one's guard about the various descriptions and accounts given by travellers who make only brief visits

to this country. One must rather, like Mr. Thomas or Livingstone, like Mr. Moffat or Mr. Mackenzie, have lived for twenty or thirty years amongst these African tribes, in order to understand more fully their manner of life and thought.

With the first days of May our winter, or dry season, began. It is the period for hunting, as I have mentioned in previous letters. Our English and Boer hunters, having paid their tax to the king, have made their preparations for hunting as far as the more distant boundaries of the Matabele country. As for me, at the moment, I am content to do my only hunting within our own enclosure, and even with this I am not always fortunate, as witness the following little story. The other day, towards evening, in the twilight, I thought I saw a lynx up on the fence of our poultry yard. Quickly, I fetched my rifle, I aimed and fired: the animal fell down dead; I went over. Alas! the lynx... it was our big old tom-cat. And it must be remarked that there are no cats at all in this country: our dear Raminagrobis, the only one of his kind in the whole country, was the admiration of white men and natives alike. In addition, always on the watch, he had killed a large number of rats and mice. I would have given a fine trek-ox in exchange for our poor cat, one of our most faithful friends: he had come with us to Gubuluwayo all the way from Grahamstown.

During the rainy season, that is, the summer, we laid in plentiful provisions for our colleagues in Tati and in Panda-Ma-Tenka, and also for Father Depelchin, who left ten days ago for the Upper Zambesi. At Gubuluwayo, as I have already explained, we have an abundance of everything: millet, maize, milk, butter, cheese, eggs, chickens, ducks, game, mutton etc., etc. It is not the same at the other mission stations. There, the missionaries have to struggle with all sorts of difficulties and with the privations of the savage life of Africa.

The summer is ended. Already the swallows have left us. Perhaps one or other of them which have nested on the walls of our residence in Gubuluwayo, may fly off to find shelter in our beloved Belgium, to chirp and fly around your hospitable roofs. If only you could recognize them, they might perhaps talk to you, and might at least remind you of the poor Zambesi missionaries, who are unable to emigrate every autumn as they are able to do, but whom a kindly Providence looks after amid the deserts and swamps of southern Africa.

Gubuluwayo, the 10th June, 1881.

Recently we received, all at the same time, the *sixteen* mails which we missed during the Transvaal war. It was a great joy, after many months of waiting, to have news of our relatives and friends, of our country, and of the Church.

The burning question of the moment in Gubuluwayo is the cattle-sickness. It is beginning to break out in our own stables. At Shilo, at Mr. Thomas' place, fourteen beasts out of twenty-four have died. Another Protestant minister has lost six. At Tati several beasts have died in a similar way.

The Boers of Southern Africa and most of the Kaffirs, practice inoculation in a somewhat haphazard manner. I have tried to explain to those

who are interested that the best method to follow is that which we use in Belgium, particularly at Hasselt, the system extolled by Dr. Willems. Besides, the sickness here does not have exactly the same symptoms and the same characteristics as in Belgium: so one must proceed with great care. Who would have believed that progress carried out in Belgium would so soon have reached the mountains of the Matabele, and that a poor missionary would thus be able to be of some service to the cattle of Gubulwayo and its environs? But a missionary must take an interest in everything which pertains to the well-being of the people among whom he is called to live. In order to become a doctor of souls, he must often also be a doctor for their bodies, and even, sometimes a veterinary surgeon and an agriculturist. As Saint Ignatius said to missionaries, one must first learn to speak to people in their own language in order to make them more disposed, little by little, to listen to our teachings; one must enter by their own door in order to bring them out through our door.

But this advice is not exactly practical as regards the Kaffirs of Matabeleland. These poor wretches are so very far away from any Christian ideas at all, they are so plunged in materialism, a prey to the grossest of superstitions and to the most abominable practices, that we shall need a great many years indeed before we shall be able to fill up the abyss which separates them from Christianity. They seem to have no conscience at all. They have scarcely any idea of justice, of guilt, or of moral faults. To be caught and to be punished, for them, that is the only evil. Speak to these blacks of holiness, of the unity and indissolubility of marriage: they will stare at you stupidly and will laugh jeeringly in your face like the lowest rakes of our great cities. The purity of the doctrine of Jesus Christ is for them an enigma, a scandal and a folly. Poor people, their eyes are covered with a heavy veil. Only God can lift it and reveal to these poor Africans his good and gentle light.

We must begin our work with the children, with those souls which are as yet untarnished, but we shall still have many difficulties. The parents do not wish their children to be better than they are themselves, and the pitiless level of savagery is imposed upon all like a rod of iron, an institution of the State. Here and there one finds an exception: I have written to you about the two children who have been confided to our care. Three days ago, a little Mashona slave, aged ten years, was given to our care for six months. True, it is not much, but, at the end of this period, I hope to obtain an extension of time, and perhaps I may be able to make of him, too, a catechist, a companion for the two sons of our Kaffir from the Cape. Anyway, all three, at the moment, are following my classes, and I am also taking the opportunity of perfecting myself in their own language. It is, therefore, the beginnings of a school, somewhat precarious, it is true, but a beginning all the same.

## 25. GIFTS AND GOODS ARRIVE

Gubuluwayo, 28th July, 1881.

The kind offerings of our friends in Belgium have arrived safely in Matabeleland; please thank our benefactors in our behalf.

Two wagons from the Diamond Fields brought these many gifts a few days ago. The seven big packing-cases were in perfect order. As our Fathers at the Zambesi were in the greatest need, we sent them some very necessary things. That is only fair: here we lack for nothing; at Panda-Ma-Tenka the missionaries have only one portable altar. As our mode of life is so isolated and so changeable, each Father needs to carry with him his own portable altar, lest he be deprived, often for a very considerable period of time, of the happiness of celebrating the holy sacrifice.

I was not able to be present for the unpacking; but Father De Wit tells me that it was magnificent, far too fine, indeed, for our wretched population. The handkerchiefs, the cotton cloths, the blankets, are Belgian fashion. However, our Matabele really prefer a sort of cheap calico, blue or white; and we can buy this sort of material here by the roll at 70 or 80 centimes for an ell. The blacks do not give more for a beautiful embroidered handkerchief than for a scrap of calico worth 20 centimes. What will you? It is their taste,..." *de gustibus non est disputandum.*"

Also, goods coming here from Europe cost a good deal in transport. After our two years' experience, I think it would be better to send us from Belgium only those church ornaments which it is impossible for us to obtain in the Cape Colony. The transport of seven large cases from Cape Town to Kimberley cost 300 francs, and from Kimberley to here, the expense of a wagon comes to about 2,000 francs. Might I therefore venture to beg of our benefactors to allow us their gifts in money rather than in kind. You will understand the position without difficulty: thus, for example, 400 francs is the price of 16 oxen, that is to say, a full span; for the same sum, I could buy a flock of 100 sheep and goats; for a pound, or 25 francs, I can buy an ox, perhaps even two, or 5 or 6 sheep. When communications have been properly restored, after the peace between the Transvaal and England, we shall easily be able to purchase in Africa itself, and at a favourable price, all the things which we normally need.

## 26. GU - BULAWAYO NO MORE

Gubuluwayo, 28th August, 1881.

Amazing news! and which will doubtless greatly astonish you in Belgium. Gubuluwayo, the city of Lo Bengula, founded by him in 1870, Gubuluwayo, the capital of the Empire of the Matabele, and the queen of the Matoppo Mountains, Gubuluwayo no longer exists! Three weeks ago, Lo Bengula informed his subjects that it was his pleasure to transfer the capital to a league beyond his residence of the "White Rocks, Amatsche Amhlope", to a locality called Umhlabatine. Gubuluwayo consisted only of some 200 huts and a thousand inhabitants. But, for the annual feasts of the Great and Little Dance and for ceremonial occasion, the population

mounted sometimes to more than 12,000 souls. Lo Bengula has committed to my care his arsenal and his goods.

The transfer of the capital will be carried out without great difficulty. You must not imagine anything similar to the removal of a European capital. Here all is simple and primitive. Already most of the families have gone off to build their bamboo huts at the new site. Soon the others will follow, and Gubuluwayo will become a desert like Nineveh and Babylon. Only it will leave no ruins behind, nor traces of its ephemeral existence.

These changes of capital are frequent in the negro kingdoms; and here is the reason.

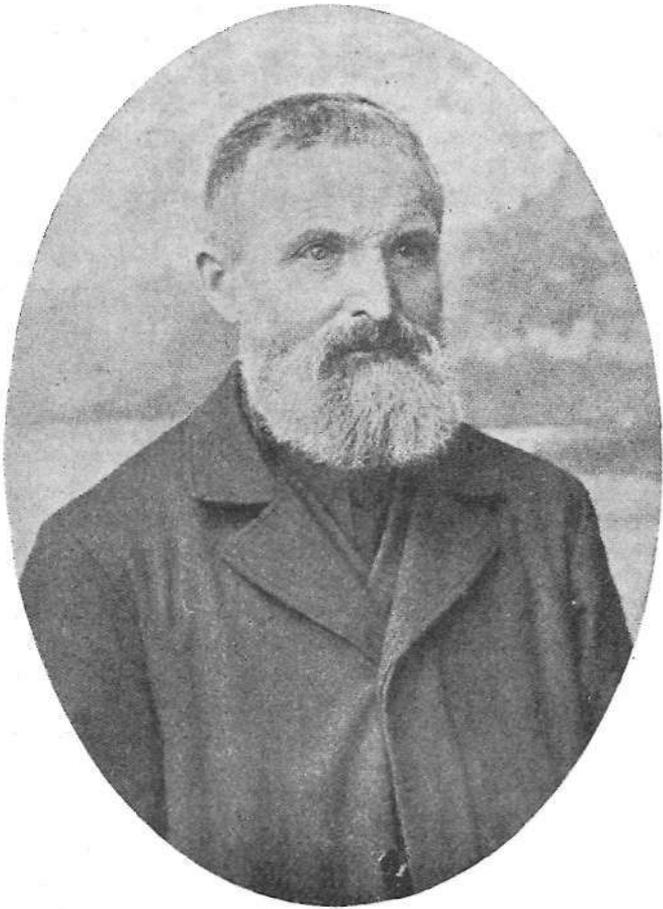
After some years, the kaffir kraals begin to have difficulty in subsisting due to the lack of the necessities of life, and the inhabitants must emigrate rather like nomads. After ten or twelve years, all the woods near the village have become despoiled; the trees and scrub have been used for their fires, and it is necessary to go very far indeed to procure the daily requirements of wood for the kitchen. The Court burns a great deal of wood, and the stocks become particularly exhausted during the feasts which last one or two weeks. In addition, the Kaffirs do not manure their lands, and the soil becomes exhausted so that it no longer produces even the poor crop of millet necessary for the subsistence of the inhabitants. They must then think of moving their tents elsewhere. Lo Bengula, making the great decision, has decided to move to a district fairly near one of his more customary residences. Umhlabatine is situated a good league from the "White Rocks" and six leagues from our house in Gubuluwayo.

We do not yet know what we shall do, and whether we shall follow the king to his new capital. The other white people are in a similar state of indecision. For them, as for us, to move house is not so easy and would necessitate great expense.

Gubuluwayo, 20th September, 1881.

I have just been present at a most moving spectacle! Five days ago, on Thursday the 15th September, Gubuluwayo was officially destroyed. On the seventh day after the full moon, Makwekwe, the former induna or governor of the capital, received from the king the order to go to the old town and to set all the dwellings on fire. Makwekwe therefore set about burning the king's palace, the queens' huts, all the buildings in the royal kraal, sheds, stables, coaches, and even the chariot of the old king Mosilikatsi. At first I accompanied Makwekwe in his work of destruction, then I retired to a little hill in order the better to view this spectacle. When his task was finished, Makwekwe came to me, shook me by the hand and said: "Lambile", that is to say, 'I am hungry'. He hadn't thought of providing himself with any dinner, and I had to offer him a meal at our Residence of the Sacred Heart.

I fear that, in a few weeks, the inhabitants of the neighbouring kraals will imitate the example of the citizens of Gubuluwayo and go off also to settle down near the new capital. We shall find ourselves very isolated and shall find it difficult to keep in close contact with the Matabele nation, with their chiefs and with their king. Time will doubtless tell us what we must do.



*Brother de Sadeleer*

It is still very cold in these African Alps; we shiver and are obliged to make a fire in our chimneyless rooms: the smoke chokes us as it does in the kaffir huts. But "when in Rome do as the Romans do". To give you an idea of the rigorous cold this year, here is a fact which will astonish you. A Matabele native recently brought to Gubuluwayo an ox laden with Kaffir-corn; the loaded animal could only proceed very slowly and the Matabele was unable to reach the town before nightfall; obliged to stop on the road, he slept in the open air; next day he was found dead by the roadside, frozen by the intense cold of the night. This event, which took place on the 28th August, astonished us the more because usually after the month of July, the very cold winds cease and the temperature becomes a little milder. This year, because of their continuance, we have had an exceptionally severe winter.

Fortunately, we had laid in our provisions at the end of the summer or rainy season. Each week we kill a sheep and each month a fat bullock: that is our butcher's meat. When we kill a fat ox, the white people of Gubuluwayo receive their share. Four European families are at present living in our neighbourhood. To each we send a quarter of the animal, for which they pay us 5 or 6 francs. When one of themselves kills a beast in his turn, he also shares it with the other houses.

You see that, in so far as food is concerned, we do not live too badly in Gubuluwayo. It remains to be seen whether that will now continue. As for the moral and spiritual life, that is another question about which I shall not write to-day. Besides we shall soon be plunged, owing to the removal of the capital, into a profound solitude. Several of the English people living here will probably be obliged to follow the king to his new capital, and then the good God alone knows what will become of us. We must repeat with confidence the words of David: "Dominus regit me, nihil mihi deerit."

## 27. CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN PEOPLES

Gubuluwayo, 21th October, 1881.

Gubuluwayo no longer exists: we are now in a veritable desert. Since the destruction of the town, the Europeans spend much of their time with the king; the natives are no longer to be seen at all in this neighbourhood; weeks pass by without our seeing a living soul. Three days ago Father De Wit took Brother De Sadeleer with him to Tati: I should like to be able to believe that the health of this good and courageous Brother will be able to withstand the far less healthy climate of this mission station as compared with his sojourn among our mountainous heights. With us remain Brother Hedley; Brother Nigg and I shall try to get him completely on his feet and to help him to forget the terrible sufferings endured by him in the country of Umzila.

No further incident interrupts the monotony of our days. The natives have, little by little, abandoned the neighbourhood of Gubuluwayo, still occupied by the white people, and settled near the new capital.

Each day we notice more decidedly that the distance which separates the white race from the black race is an abyss which only Jesus Christ himself can fill. This species of revulsion between the two races strikes the European immediately upon his arrival in Africa, and we have become particularly aware of it during our long journeyings amongst the native population. White people have a natural sympathy for other white people; in our isolation, this sympathy soon gives rise to friendship. In Africa, in the midst of the savagery of the Kaffirs, every white person whom you meet, even though he may possess a mere smattering of "social" qualities, becomes immediately a comrade and often a friend. On the contrary, I must confess that I have never yet felt the slightest affinity with a native of the country, and all the white people tell me that they feel the same with regard to this. Any feelings of affection for the blacks must be based on supernatural motives. I love these poor Africans and would willingly shed my blood for their salvation; but, frankly, I can only love them in Jesus

Christ, for the love of him and to obey his word. I have noticed that, among the blacks also, there is a great void between them and the white people and a natural antipathy for us. It is only their own interests and a pure egoism which brings them close to us. Among all the Kaffirs who have been in our service during these past three years, we have found only two or three who are grateful and honest; the others have always robbed us either in a small way, or of many things.

Since we are talking about the natives, here are a few observations which I have made. The Hottentots, whom we in Europe regard as being on the lowest rung of the social ladder, seem to me to be much more intelligent and also much more faithful than the other natives: industrious, painstaking, they often attain a certain ease of life in the South African colonies. They are robust and their features are less displeasing and of a lighter colour. Smaller than the Hottentots, the Bushmen have features which are less pleasing: they are distinguished for their agility and for their hunting skill. Neither of these two races is noted for its warlike instincts: so, they are often placed in subjection by the Kaffirs, and particularly by the Kaffir-Zulus, to whom the Matabele belong. The characteristics of the Zulus are well-known: bravery, intrepidity, but also a deep corruption; addicted to laziness, they neglect agriculture, industry and commerce. Living entirely by pillage and by war, they seem to refuse any progress at all, and are, in this respect, the most backward and the most barbarous of all the natives of southern Africa.

## 27. A MOVE INEVITABLE

Gubuluwayo, 18th November, 1881.

Every day we expect to get news from the Upper Zambesi. This is Father Depelchin's second expedition to the banks of the great river, in the Empire of the Marotse. Let us hope that the good Providence is watching over him and his companions and that their good angels will bring them back to us safe and sound. They will need some time to recover from their travels. We are preparing a great welcome for them.

After Father Depelchin's return, we shall have to think about founding another residence in the country of the Matabele. Our stay in Gubuluwayo is becoming impossible: for three leagues around us, there is not a living soul, not a kraal, not a hut. It is like a desert around us and we have not come here to be like the monks of the Chartreuse.

Soon, I hope, you will receive more news from us and good news, too! May God keep you all!